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MODERN ONE-ACT PLAYS

EDITED BY
PHILIP WAYNE, M.A.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

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INTRODUCTION

THE present vogue of one-act plays is due to an amateur movement that promises to make history ; for whatever be the shortcomings of the clubs and the class-rooms they offer good evidence of an awakened interest in drama throughout our nation. People want plays. That, says Mr. St. John Ervine (March 1935), is the best news he can or ever could give his readers. Incidentally it is news that saves this book from apology ; indeed the purpose of this selection and of this introduction gathered comfort from the critic's dispute with his unknown correspondent, whose lonely voice is not perhaps to be disregarded entirely. She was the ' first that ever burst ' into the ken of many people with the suggestion that the multitudinous activity of the amateurs is possibly not a blessing unminged. It is not that they have robbed the touring companies of public attention—the companies had previously robbed themselves, by chasing a base chimera of public taste—but the amateurs are in danger of pre-occupation with dramatics at any price, with undistinguished performances of pieces written to meet the unprecedented demand. In

fact, there is a tide in this affair of plays which, taken at the flood, leads on to obscured criterion. Anyone who cares to read four or five hundred of them will sympathise with those producers who aim at work of human sincerity and significance.

Authors who write from distinguished force and purpose were ever in the minority. We have great need of the good plays that good authors have written; and, to be honest, the number of poor plays, written, acted and earnestly recommended is considerable enough to suggest that a large number of people providing dramatic fare are not clear in their judgment. To put it briefly, they mistake the theatrical for the dramatic. Their people say 'Yes, mon Colonel' or, of Miss Green, 'How verdant!' or ask at a moment of agonising crisis 'Would you have had any compunction about taking her place, if, by any means, you could make up to him for what he'd lost and win the love she did not value?' Such work will not come to life by glamour in the stage directions, not even by the word 'passionately' in brackets, nor will to-day's great hobby, stage-lighting, solve and atone for all.

Whether in comedy or in tragedy, 'historical-pastoral, tragical-historical,' the differentiation between the truly dramatic and the merely theatrical is an old question. Drama emerges when a sharp clash of interest arises from difference of human character and motive; though there is indeed an austere kind of drama in which human protagonists

seem to be in clash with a hidden will called Fate. The enormous difficulty of writing good drama lies chiefly in two matters. First, the characters must be conceived and sustained independently, which requires in the maker a far-seeing and objective imagination ; in the second place the whole enactment, in its severe brevity and its exclusion of any backward-reference, requires strong unity, a matter for consummate skill and neatness. What seems to have unnerved the Edwardian theatre is its anxiety for neatness—that and the fact that the ‘ situations ’ so meticulously prepared had reference not so much to human passions as to the horror of breaking caste or social code. Dramatic situation is still in many minds the ‘ aim or butt.’ Contrive the situation and cut the characters out of cardboard, characters from life-as-we-have-dimly-heard-it-is, life at second-hand or third. Yet Shakespeare is great not for dramatic situation chiefly, but because his characters maintain a separate, dramatic existence and have the moving integrity of life at first-hand.

Now, it would seem that one-act plays are of all plays those most likely to suffer from theatricality and lack of characterisation. Their economy is formidable. In no play is there time for characters to grow up : in the one-act play there is not even time for evolution of their motives. The characters must stand there, recognisable from a minimum of deft strokes, and not complicated even in finality. Suppose a man covets his brother’s wife and estate

and kills him for possession of both : with all that settled before the curtain rises, the woman's son may come and avenge his murdered father in a neat one-act play, but we shall not get much of *Hamlet*. Nor is it safe to suppose that the author who required five acts for the job was lacking in power, nor to declare that it is 'just a matter of treatment.' The fact remains that the one-act play must forgo depth or elaboration of characterisation. This the advocates of one-act plays apparently regard as an advantage. They are all for the virtues of speed, or else the entirely different virtues of cameo ; and, with plays in view differing endlessly both in theme and in treatment, they rejoice in the conclusion that 'the one-act play is an Art Form in itself.' It has, in fact, one act.

The present collection gathers from the great diversity of one-act plays some examples which will, it is hoped, prove interesting to read or to act ; and from them some observations on the nature of the one-act play may be drawn, but cautiously. First, the chief dramatic motive must be ready-made, apt for the briefest statement or demonstration. Before the opening of Mr. Drinkwater's play a man has been lost in a blizzard. The true protagonists are now the storm and the woman's mind. Some would say this is poetic and not dramatic. A false division. As though there is not dramatic tension in the duel of the mind with despair. In the end no word is spoken, a stroke of

poetic-dramatic genius. Used without poetry this would be merely a theatrical trick. In Mr. Bottomley's quiet, tiny piece the poetry of human regard sustains the duologue. The poetry of Mr. Bax's play—quiet, too, but more ornate—gives another opportunity for the cultivation of verse-speaking. This modern 'morality' can be unfolded in any suitable room. Galsworthy's altogether different 'morality' of the theatre begins with lighting vagaries that need a theatre; but in mere reading the effects are very amusing to a lively imagination. The motive of Mr. Bottomley's play is presented in the first two words, *A Parting*. Mr. Brighouse's play is really a parting treated with mundane elaboration and social inference. In Synge's play the motive is revealed in sudden comedy when Dan sits up in bed. 'Saki' posits a nuisance and works charmingly with polite types to the dénouement which gets rid of her. Mr. Eden Phillpotts sends in an ugly burglar to a home of polite and fearless leisure: we watch the reaction; the dénouement is nothing; the characters differ in age, sex and Christmas presents; they are family types rather than individuals. Synge has more characterisation than I remember in any one-act play; and yet, carefully examined, his people are not so much odd individuals as odd, skilfully delineated types. Types are what the economy of the one-act play requires. The aspirant to success in one-act plays must not, however, regard this as an easy road to fame.

Molière is full of types, and they are given a touch of universality, thanks to a genius of profound observation, good sense and humanity, and there lies the rub. It is fearfully hard to make types live.

The good friend of aspirants usually stresses a few 'don'ts.' Some have been seen already. Don't choose for situation or dénouement alone : people can read detective stories at home if they wish. Almost as little worth for dramatic representation are the plays filled with the sharpening of modern wit, yet without humour. Don't remain long in the hands of producers with 'priceless brainwaves' : they are usually the worst enemies to acting that shall be telling in its sincerity. *Ergo*, don't blame the Editor for preferring Mr. Thornton Wilder's *Love and How to Cure It* to his better-known *Long Christmas Dinner* : my reason, humbly said in the presence of our Publishers, is that I fear Production may defeat the audience. *Love and How to Cure It* gives good types and is not over-sentimental, maintaining as it does the motive of the discontented lover even to the last pout of the girl's surly mind. In any case don't listen to the Editor any more, but accept his good wishes for your enjoyment of one-act plays.

PHILIP WAYNE.

London, 1935.

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	vii
THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN. <i>J. M. Synge</i> .	I
THE STORM. <i>John Drinkwater</i>	25
A PARTING. <i>Gordon Bottomley</i>	43
SMOKE-SCREENS. <i>Harold Brighouse</i> . . .	53
SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT. <i>Eden Phillpotts</i>	81
LOVE AND HOW TO CURE IT. <i>Thornton Wilder</i>	115
THE ROSE AND THE CROSS. <i>Clifford Bax</i> .	135
PUNCH AND GO. <i>John Galsworthy</i> . . .	153
THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT. 'Saki' (<i>H. H. Munro</i>)	175
NOTES	193

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN

J. M. SYNGE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

DAN BURKE, *Farmer and Herd.*

NORA BURKE, *his Wife.*

MICHAEL DARA, *a young Herd.*

A TRAMP.

SCENE.—*The last cottage at the head of a long glen in
County Wicklow.*

Applications regarding amateur performance of this play should be addressed to Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN

Cottage kitchen ; turf-fire on the right ; a bed near it against the wall, with a body lying on it covered with a sheet. A door is at the other end of the room, with a low table near it, and stools, or wooden chairs. There are a couple of glasses on the table, and a bottle of whisky, as if for a wake, with two cups, a teapot, and a home-made cake. There is another small door near the bed. NORA BURKE is moving about the room, settling a few things, and lighting candles on the table, looking now and then at the bed with an uneasy look. Some one knocks softly at the door. She takes up a stocking with money from the table and puts it in her pocket. Then she opens the door.

TRAMP [*outside*]. Good evening to you, lady of the house.

NORA. Good evening kindly, stranger ; it's a wild night, God help you, to be out in the rain falling.

TRAMP. It is, surely, and I walking to Brittas from the Aughrim fair.

NORA. Is it walking on your feet, stranger ?

TRAMP. On my two feet, lady of the house, and when I saw the light below I thought maybe if you'd a sup of new milk and a quiet, decent corner where a man could sleep . . . [*He looks in past her and sees the dead man.*] The Lord have mercy on us all !

NORA. It doesn't matter anyway, stranger ; come in out of the rain.

TRAMP [*coming in slowly and going towards the bed*]. Is it departed he is ?

NORA. It is, stranger. He's after dying on me, God forgive him, and there I am now with a hundred sheep beyond on the hills, and no turf drawn for the winter.

TRAMP [*looking closely at the dead man*]. It's a queer look is on him for a man that's dead.

NORA [*half-humorously*]. He was always queer, stranger ; and I suppose them that's queer and they living men will be queer bodies after.

TRAMP. Isn't it a great wonder you're letting him lie there, and he not tidied, or laid out itself ?

NORA [*coming to the bed*]. I was afeard, stranger, for he put a black curse on me this morning if I'd touch his body the time he'd die sudden, or let anyone touch it except his sister only, and it's ten miles away she lives, in the big glen over the hill.

TRAMP [*looking at her and nodding slowly*]. It's a queer story he wouldn't let his own wife touch him, and he dying quiet in his bed.

NORA. He was an old man, and an odd man,

stranger, and it's always upon the hills he was, thinking thoughts in the dark mist . . . [*She pulls back a bit of the sheet.*] Lay your hand on him now, and tell me if it's cold he is surely.

TRAMP. Is it getting the curse on me you'd be, woman of the house? I wouldn't lay my hand on him for the Lough Nahanagan and it filled with gold.

NORA [*looking uneasily at the body*]. Maybe cold would be no sign of death with the like of him, for he was always cold, every day since I knew him . . . and every night, stranger . . . [*she covers up his face and comes away from the bed*]; but I'm thinking it's dead he is surely, for he's complaining a while back of a pain in his heart, and this morning, the time he was going off to Brittas for three days or four, he was taken with a sharp turn. Then he went into his bed, and he was saying it was destroyed he was, the time the shadow was going up through the glen, and when the sun set on the bog beyond he made a great lep, and let a great cry out of him, and stiffened himself out the like of a dead sheep.

TRAMP [*crosses himself*]. God rest his soul.

NORA [*pouring him out a glass of whisky*]. Maybe that would do you better than the milk of the sweetest cow in County Wicklow.

TRAMP. The Almighty God reward you and may it be to your good health.

[*He drinks.*]

NORA [*giving him a pipe and tobacco*]. I've no pipes

saving his own, stranger, but they're sweet pipes to smoke.

TRAMP. Thank you kindly, lady of the house.

NORA. Sit down now, stranger, and be taking your rest.

TRAMP [*filling a pipe and looking about the room*]. I've walked a great way through the world, lady of the house, and seen great wonders, but I never seen a wake till this day with fine spirits, and good tobacco, and the best of pipes, and no one to taste them but a woman only.

NORA. Didn't you hear me say it was only after dying on me he was when the sun went down, and how would I go out into the glen and tell the neighbours, and I a lone woman with no house near me?

TRAMP [*drinking*]. There's no offence, lady of the house?

NORA. No offence in life, stranger. How would the like of you, passing in the dark night, know the lonesome way I was with no house near me at all?

TRAMP [*sitting down*]. I knew rightly. [*He lights his pipe, so that there is a sharp light beneath his haggard face.*] And I was thinking, and I coming in through the door, that it's many a lone woman would be afeard of the like of me in the dark night, in a place wouldn't be as lonesome as this place, where there aren't two living souls would see the little light you have shining from the glass.

NORA [*slowly*]. I'm thinking many would be afeard, but I never knew what way I'd be afeard of beggar or bishop or any man of you at all . . . [*She looks towards the window and lowers her voice.*] It's other things than the like of you, stranger, would make a person afeard.

TRAMP [*looking round with a half-shudder*]. It is surely, God help us all !

NORA [*looking at him for a moment with curiosity*]. You're saying that, stranger, as if you were easy afeard.

TRAMP [*speaking mournfully*]. Is it myself, lady of the house, that does be walking round in the long nights, and crossing the hills when the fog is on them, the time a little stick would seem as big as your arm, and a rabbit as big as a bay horse, and a stack of turf as big as a towering church in the city of Dublin ? If myself was easy afeard, I'm *telling you, it's long ago I'd have been locked into the Richmond Asylum, or maybe have run up into the back hills with nothing on me but an old shirt, and been eaten by the crows the like of Patch Darcy—the Lord have mercy on him—in the year that's gone.*

NORA [*with interest*]. You knew Darcy ?

TRAMP. Wasn't I the last one heard his living voice in the whole world ?

NORA. There were great stories of what was heard at that time, but would anyone believe the things they do be saying in the glen ?

TRAMP. It was no lie, lady of the house. . . . I was passing below on a dark night the like of this night, and the sheep were lying under the ditch and every one of them coughing and choking like an old man, with the great rain and the fog. Then I heard a thing talking—queer talk, you wouldn't believe it at all, and you out of your dreams—and 'Merciful God,' says I, 'if I begin hearing the like of that voice out of the thick mist, I'm destroyed surely.' Then I run and I run till I was below in Rathvanna. I got drunk that night, I got drunk in the morning, and drunk the day after—I was coming from the races beyond—and the third day they found Darcy . . . Then I knew it was himself I was after hearing, and I wasn't afeard any more.

NORA [*speaking sorrowfully and slowly*]. God spare Darcy ; he'd always look in here and he passing up or passing down, and it's very lonesome I was after him a long while [*she looks over at the bed and lowers her voice, speaking very slowly*], and then I got happy again—if it's ever happy we are, stranger—for I got used to being lonesome.

[*A short pause ; then she stands up.*]

NORA. Was there anyone on the last bit of the road, stranger, and you coming from Aughrim ?

TRAMP. There was a young man with a drift of mountain ewes, and he running after them this way and that.

NORA [*with a half-smile*]. Far down, stranger ?

TRAMP. A piece only.

[NORA fills the kettle and puts it on the fire.]

NORA. Maybe, if you're not easy afeard, you'd stay here a short while alone with himself.

TRAMP. I would surely. A man that's dead can do no hurt.

NORA [*speaking with a sort of constraint*]. I'm going a little back to the west, stranger, for himself would go there one night and another and whistle at that place, and then the young man you're after seeing—a kind of a farmer has come up from the sea to live in a cottage beyond—would walk round to see if there was a thing we'd have to be done, and I'm wanting him this night, the way he can go down into the glen when the sun goes up and tell the people that himself is dead.

TRAMP [*looking at the body in the sheet*]. It's myself will go for him, lady of the house, and let you not be destroying yourself with the great rain.

NORA. You wouldn't find your way, stranger, for there's a small path only, and it running up between two sluigs where an ass and cart would be drowned. [*She puts a shawl over her head.*] Let you be making yourself easy, and saying a prayer for his soul, and it's not long I'll be coming again.

TRAMP [*moving uneasily*]. Maybe if you'd a piece of a grey thread and a sharp needle—there's great safety in a needle, lady of the house—I'd be putting a little stitch here and there in my old coat, the

time I'll be praying for his soul, and it going up naked to the saints of God.

NORA [*takes a needle and thread from the front of her dress and gives it to him*]. There's the needle, stranger, and I'm thinking you won't be lonesome, and you used to the back hills, for isn't a dead man itself more company than to be sitting alone, and hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?

TRAMP [*slowly*]. It's true, surely, and the Lord have mercy on us all!

[NORA goes out. The tramp begins stitching one of the tags in his coat, saying the 'De Profundis' under his breath. In an instant the sheet is drawn slowly down, and DAN BURKE looks out. The tramp moves uneasily, then looks up, and springs to his feet with a movement of terror.]

DAN [*with a hoarse voice*]. Don't be afeard, stranger; a man that's dead can do no hurt.

TRAMP [*trembling*]. I meant no harm, your honour; and won't you leave me easy to be saying a little prayer for your soul?

[A long whistle is heard outside.]

DAN [*sitting up in his bed and speaking fiercely*]. Ah, the devil mend her. . . . Do you hear that, stranger? Did ever you hear another woman could whistle the like of that with two fingers in her mouth? [*He looks at the table hurriedly.*] I'm destroyed with the drouth, and let you bring me a drop quickly before herself will come back.

TRAMP [*doubtfully*]. Is it not dead you are?

DAN. How would I be dead, and I as dry as a baked bone, stranger?

TRAMP [*pouring out the whisky*]. What will herself say if she smells the stuff on you, for I'm thinking it's not for nothing you're letting on to be dead?

DAN. It is not, stranger; but she won't be coming near me at all, and it's not long now I'll be letting on, for I've a cramp in my back, and my hip's asleep on me, and there's been the devil's own fly itching my nose. It's near dead I was wanting to sneeze, and you blathering about the rain, and Darcy [*bitterly*]*—the devil choke him—and the towering church. [Crying out impatiently.]* Give me that whisky. Would you have herself come back before I taste a drop at all?

[TRAMP gives him the glass.]

DAN [*after drinking*]. Go over now to that cupboard, and bring me a black stick you'll see in the west corner by the wall.

TRAMP [*taking a stick from the cupboard*]. Is it that, your honour?

DAN. It is, stranger; it's a long time I'm keeping that stick, for I've a bad wife in the house.

TRAMP [*with a queer look*]. Is it herself, master of the house, and she a grand woman to talk?

DAN. It's herself, surely, it's a bad wife she is—a bad wife for an old man, and I'm getting old, God help me, though I've an arm to me still. [*He*

takes the stick in his hand.] Let you wait now a short while, and it's a great sight you'll see in this room in two hours or three. [*He stops to listen.*] Is that somebody above?

TRAMP [*listening*]. There's a voice speaking on the path.

DAN. Put that stick here in the bed and smooth the sheet the way it was lying. [*He covers himself up hastily.*] Be falling to sleep now, and don't let on you know anything, or I'll be having your life. I wouldn't have told you at all but it's destroyed with the drouth I was.

TRAMP [*covering his head*]. Have no fear, master of the house. What is it I know of the like of you that I'd be saying a word or putting out my hand to stay you at all?

[He goes back to the fire, sits down on a stool with his back to the bed, and goes on stitching his coat.]

DAN [*under the sheet, querulously*]. Stranger!

TRAMP [*quickly*]. Whisht! whisht! Be quiet, I'm telling you; they're coming now at the door.

[NORA comes in with MICHAEL DARA, a tall, innocent young man, behind her.]

NORA. I wasn't long at all, stranger, for I met himself on the path.

TRAMP. You were middling long, lady of the house.

NORA. There was no sign from himself?

TRAMP. No sign at all, lady of the house.

NORA [*to MICHAEL*]. Go over now and pull down

the sheet, and look on himself, Michael Dara, and you'll see it's the truth I'm telling you.

MICHAEL. I will not, Nora ; I do be afeard of the dead.

[He sits down on a stool next the table, facing the tramp.]

NORA *puts the kettle on a lower hook of the pot-hooks, and piles turf under it.*

NORA *[turning to tramp]*. Will you drink a sup of tea with myself and the young man, stranger, or *[speaking more persuasively]* will you go into the little room and stretch yourself a short while on the bed ? I'm thinking it's destroyed you are walking the length of that way in the great rain.

TRAMP. Is it go away and leave you, and you having a wake, lady of the house ? I will not, surely. *[He takes a drink from his glass, which he has beside him.]* And it's none of your tea I'm asking either.

[He goes on stitching. NORA makes the tea.]

MICHAEL *[after looking at the tramp rather scornfully for a moment]*. That's a poor coat you have, God help you, and I'm thinking it's a poor tailor you are with it.

TRAMP. If it's a poor tailor I am, I'm thinking it's a poor herd does be running backward and forward after a little handful of ewes, the way I seen yourself running this day, young fellow, and you coming from the fair.

[NORA comes back to the table.]

NORA *[to MICHAEL in a low voice]*. Let you not

mind him at all, Michael Dara ; he has a drop taken, and it's soon he'll be falling asleep.

MICHAEL. It's no lie he's telling ; I was destroyed, surely. They were that wilful they were running off into one man's bit of oats, and another man's bit of hay, and tumbling into the red bog till it's more like a pack of old goats than sheep they were. . . . Mountain ewes is a queer breed, Nora Burke, and I not used to them at all.

NORA [*settling the tea-things*]. There's no one can drive a mountain ewe but the men do be reared in the Glenmalure, I've heard them say, and above by Rathvanna, and the Glen Imaal—men the like of Patch Darcy, God spare his soul, who would walk through five hundred sheep and miss one of them, and he not reckoning them at all.

MICHAEL [*uneasily*]. Is it the man went queer in his head the year that's gone ?

NORA. It is, surely.

TRAMP [*plaintively*]. That was a great man, young fellow—a great man, I'm telling you. There was never a lamb from his own ewes he wouldn't know before it was marked, and he'd run from this to the city of Dublin and never catch for his breath.

NORA [*turning round quickly*]. He was a great man surely, stranger ; and isn't it a grand thing when you hear a living man saying a good word of a dead man, and he mad dying ?

TRAMP. It's the truth I'm saying, God spare his soul.

[He puts the needle under the collar of his coat, and settles himself to sleep in the chimney corner.]

NORA sits down at the table: NORA and MICHAEL'S backs are turned to the bed.

MICHAEL *[looking at her a queer look]*. I heard tell this day, Nora Burke, that it was on the path below Patch Darcy would be passing up and passing down, and I heard them say he'd never pass it night or morning without speaking with yourself.

NORA *[in a low voice]*. It was no lie you heard, Michael Dara.

MICHAEL. I'm thinking it's a power of men you're after knowing if it's in a lonesome place you live itself.

NORA *[giving him his tea]*. It's in a lonesome, place you do have to be talking with some one, and looking for some one, in the evening of the day, and if it's a power of men I'm after knowing they were fine men, for I was a hard child to please, and a hard girl to please *[she looks at him a little sternly]*, and it's a hard woman I am to please this day, Michael Dara, and it's no lie I'm telling you.

MICHAEL *[looking over to see that the tramp is asleep, and then pointing to the dead man]*. Was it a hard woman to please you were when you took himself for your man?

NORA. What way would I live, and I an old woman, if I didn't marry a man with a bit of a farm, and cows on it, and sheep on the back hills?

MICHAEL *[considering]*. That's true, Nora, and

maybe it's no fool you were, for there's good grazing on it, if it is a lonesome place, and I'm thinking it's a good sum he's left behind.

NORA [*taking the stocking with the money from her pocket, and putting it on the table*]. I do be thinking in the long nights it was a big fool I was that time, Michael Dara ; for what good is a bit of a farm with cows on it, and sheep on the back hills, when you do be sitting looking out from a door the like of that door, and seeing nothing but the mists rolling down the bog, and the mists again and they rolling up the bog, and hearing nothing but the wind crying out in the bits of broken trees were left from the great storm, and the streams roaring with the rain ?

MICHAEL [*looking at her uneasily*]. What is it ails you this night, Nora Burke ? I've heard tell it's the like of that talk you do hear from men, and they after being a great while on the back hills.

NORA [*putting out the money on the table*]. It's a bad night, and a wild night, Michael Dara, and isn't it a great while I am at the foot of the back hills, sitting up here boiling food for himself, and food for the brood sow, and baking a cake when the night falls ? [*She puts up the money listlessly in little piles on the table.*] Isn't it a long while I am sitting here in the winter and the summer, and the fine spring, with the young growing behind me and the old passing, saying to myself one time to look on Mary Brien, who wasn't that height [*holding out her hand*], and I a fine girl growing up, and there she

is now with two children, and another coming on her in three months or four.

[*She pauses.*]

MICHAEL [*moving over three of the piles*]. That's three pounds we have now, Nora Burke.

NORA [*continuing in the same voice*]. And saying to myself another time, to look on Peggy Cavanagh, who had the lightest hand at milking a cow that wouldn't be easy, or turning a cake, and there she is now walking round on the roads, or sitting in a dirty old house, with no teeth in her mouth, and no sense, and no more hair than you'd see on a bit of hill and they after burning the furze from it.

MICHAEL. That's five pounds and ten notes, a good sum, surely ! . . . It's not that way you'll be talking when you marry a young man, Nora Burke, and they were saying in the fair my lambs were the best lambs, and I got a grand price, for I'm no fool now at making a bargain when my lambs are good.

NORA. What was it you got ?

MICHAEL. Twenty pounds for the lot, Nora Burke. . . . We'd do right to wait now till himself will be quiet awhile in the Seven Churches, and then you'll marry me in the chapel of Rathvanna, and I'll bring the sheep up on the bit of a hill you have on the back mountain, and we won't have anything we'd be afeard to let our minds on when the mist is down.

NORA [*pouring him out some whisky*]. Why would I marry you, Mike Dara ? You'll be getting old

and I'll be getting old, and in a little while, I'm telling you, you'll be sitting up in your bed—the way himself was sitting—with a shake in your face, and your teeth falling, and the white hair sticking out round you like an old bush where sheep do be leaping a gap.

[DAN BURKE *sits up noiselessly from under the sheet, with his hand to his face. His white hair is sticking out round his head.* NORA goes on slowly without hearing him.

It's a pitiful thing to be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely. It's a queer thing to see an old man sitting up there in his bed with no teeth in him, and a rough word in his mouth, and his chin the way it would take the bark from the edge of an oak board you'd have building a door. . . . God forgive me, Michael Dara, we'll all be getting old, but it's a queer thing surely.

MICHAEL. It's too lonesome you are from living a long time with an old man, Nora, and you're talking again like a herd that would be coming down from the thick mist [*he puts his arm round her*], but it's a fine life you'll have now with a young man—a fine life, surely. . . .

[DAN sneezes violently. MICHAEL tries to get to the door, but before he can do so DAN jumps out of the bed in queer white clothes, with the stick in his hand, and goes over and puts his back against it.

MICHAEL. Son of God deliver us !

[Crosses himself, and goes backward across the room.

DAN [*holding up his hand at him*]. Now you'll not marry her the time I'm rotting below in the Seven Churches, and you'll see the thing I'll give you will follow you on the back mountains when the wind is high.

MICHAEL [*to NORA*]. Get me out of it, Nora, for the love of God. He always did what you bid him, and I'm thinking he would do it now.

NORA [*looking at the tramp*]. Is it dead he is or living?

DAN [*turning towards her*]. It's little you care if it's dead or living I am; but there'll be an end now of your fine times, and all the talk you have of young men and old men, and of the mist coming up or going down. [*He opens the door.*] You'll walk out now from that door, Nora Burke; and it's not to-morrow, or the next day, or any day of your life, that you'll put in your foot through it again.

TRAMP [*standing up*]. It's a hard thing you're saying for an old man, master of the house; and what would the like of her do if you put her out on the roads?

DAN. Let her walk round the like of Peggy Cavanagh below, and be begging money at the cross-roads, or selling songs to the men. [*To NORA.*] Walk out now, Nora Burke, and it's soon you'll be getting old with that life, I'm telling you; it's soon your teeth'll be falling and your head'll be the like of a bush where sheep do be leaping a gap.

[*He pauses; NORA looks round at MICHAEL.*

MICHAEL [*timidly*]. There's a fine Union below in Rathdrum.

DAN. The like of her would never go there. . . . It's lonesome roads she'll be going and hiding herself away till the end will come, and they find her stretched like a dead sheep with the frost on her, or the big spiders maybe, and they putting their webs on her, in the butt of a ditch.

NORA [*angrily*]. What way will yourself be that day, Daniel Burke? What way will you be that day and you lying down a long while in your grave? For it's bad you are living, and it's bad you'll be when you're dead. [*She looks at him a moment fiercely, then half turns away and speaks plaintively again.*] Yet, if it is itself, Daniel Burke, who can help it at all, and let you be getting up into your bed, and not be taking your death with the wind blowing on you, and the rain with it, and you half in your skin.

DAN. It's proud and happy you'd be if I was getting my death the day I was shut of yourself. [*Pointing to the door.*] Let you walk out through that door, I'm telling you, and let you not be passing this way if it's hungry you are, or wanting a bed.

TRAMP [*pointing to MICHAEL*]. Maybe himself would take her.

NORA. What would he do with me now?

TRAMP. Give you the half of a dry bed, and good food in your mouth.

DAN. Is it a fool you think him, stranger, or is it a fool you were born yourself? Let her walk out

of that door, and let you go along with her, stranger—if it's raining itself—for it's too much talk you have surely.

TRAMP [*going over to NORA*]. We'll be going now, lady of the house ; the rain is falling, but the air is kind, and maybe it'll be a grand morning, by the grace of God.

NORA. What good is a grand morning when I'm destroyed surely, and I going out to get my death walking the roads ?

TRAMP. You'll not be getting your death with myself, lady of the house, and I knowing all the ways a man can put food in his mouth. . . . We'll be going now, I'm telling you, and the time you'll be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glens, you'll not be sitting up on a wet ditch, the way you're after sitting in this place, making yourself old with looking on each day, and it passing you by. You'll be saying one time, ' It's a grand evening, by the grace of God,' and another time, ' It's a wild night, God help us ; but it'll pass, surely.' You'll be saying . . .

DAN [*goes over to them, crying out impatiently*]. Go out of that door, I'm telling you, and do your blather-ing below in the glen.

[*NORA gathers a few things into her shawl.*

TRAMP [*at the door*]. Come along with me now, lady of the house, and it's not my blather you'll be hearing only, but you'll be hearing the herons

crying out over the black lakes, and you'll be hearing the grouse and the owls with them, and the larks and the big thrushes when the days are warm ; and it's not from the like of them you'll be hearing a tale of getting old like Peggy Cavanagh, and losing the hair off you, and the light of your eyes, but it's fine songs you'll be hearing when the sun goes up, and there'll be no old fellow wheezing, the like of a sick sheep, close to your ear.

NORA. I'm thinking it's myself will be wheezing that time with lying down under the Heavens when the night is cold ; but you've a fine bit of talk, stranger, and it's with yourself I'll go. [*She goes towards the door, then turns to DAN.*] You think it's a grand thing you're after doing with your letting on to be dead, but what is it at all ? What way would a woman live in a lonesome place the like of this place, and she not making a talk with the men passing ? And what way will yourself live from this day, with none to care you ? What is it you'll have now but a black life, Daniel Burke ; and it's not long, I'm telling you, till you'll be lying again under that sheet, and you dead surely.

[*She goes out with the tramp. MICHAEL is slinking after them, but DAN stops him.*]

DAN. Sit down now and take a little taste of the stuff, Michael Dara. There's a great drouth on me, and the night is young.

MICHAEL [*coming back to the table*]. And it's very dry I am, surely, with the fear of death you put on

me, and I after driving mountain ewes since the turn of the day.

DAN [*throwing away his stick*]. I was thinking to strike you, Michael Dara ; but you're a quiet man, God help you, and I don't mind you at all. [*He pours out two glasses of whisky, and gives one to MICHAEL.*] Your good health, Michael Dara.

MICHAEL. God reward you, Daniel Burke, and may you have a long life and a quiet life, and good health with it.

[*They drink.*]

CURTAIN

THE STORM
JOHN DRINKWATER

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

ALICE.

JOAN, *her young Sister.*

SARAH.

AN OLD MAN.

A YOUNG STRANGER.

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THE STORM

A mountain cottage. It is a midwinter night. Outside a snowstorm rages.

ALICE is looking through the window. JOAN, her young sister, and SARAH, an old neighbour woman, are sitting over the fire.

ALICE. It isn't fair of God. Eyes are no good,
Nor lanterns in a blackness like to that.
How can they find him out? It isn't fair.

SARAH. God is for prayers. You'll anger Him
speaking so.

ALICE. I have prayed these hours, and now I'm
tired of it.
He is caught in some grip of the rocks, and crying
out,
And crying and crying, and none can hear him cry,
Because of this great beastliness of noise.

SARAH. Past crying now, I think.

JOAN. There, take no heed
Of what she says—it's a rusty mind she has,
Being old, and wizened with bad luck on the hills.

SARAH. Rusty or no, I've a thought the man is
dead.

No news has been growing apace from nightfall on
Into bad news, and now it's as though one stood
At the door and said—we found him lying cold.

ALICE. Whist ! you old bitter woman. Will it
never stay

In its wicked fury, . . . and the snow's like a black
rain

Whipping the crying wind. If it would rest awhile
I could think and mind me what were best to do
To help my man. But a savagery like this
Beats at the wits till they have no tidiness.

SARAH. We'll sit and wait till they come.

ALICE. And I a woman
Would never let him ask for anything,
Because of the daily thought I took for him,—
And against this spite now I've no strength at all.

SARAH. For all you would bake his bread to a
proper turn
And remember always the day for his clean shift,
There was many a scolding word for him to bear.

JOAN. Hush—

ALICE. Let her talk. What does she know at
all,—
Thinking crossed words between a man and a woman
Have anything to do with the heart ? We have,
My man and I, more than a fretful mood
Can thief or touch. My man—I must go myself.

JOAN. There is nothing you could do.

SARAH. 'Tis men
Should carry the dead man in.

ALICE. My man

SARAH. Death has a way with him,

ALICE. You know that he's not dead—

SARAH. Age is a quiet place where you can

he world bent with its pain and still be patient.

hat the newest sorrow and the oldest sorrow are

They will bring him and put him down upon the

e ready for that, girl. There are times when hope

s a fancy-man that goes without good-bye.

ALICE. I have a brain that is known in three

or a level bargain. It is strange that I should be

SARAH. The trouble is here.

ALICE. If he should walk in now—
Yes, that's the way to think. I'll work it out,
Slowly, his doings from when he left the door
Until he comes again. You stood at the oven
With cakes half-browned against his tea. And I
Stood here beside my man and strapped his coat
Under his chin. He looked across your way—
He is fond of you, child—he calls you Father

Joan

Because—but that's not it—I told him then
To-morrow would be time to bring the slates,
And let him only mend the wire to-day—
He thought so too and said—it is like a beast
Greater than half the world and crushed in a
trap,

Shrieking against the pain—what did he say?—
I have forgotten now, and I had begun
To follow it all quite clearly—what did he say?

JOAN. That an hour would see him back, and
hungry too.

ALICE. An hour would bring him back—but that
is nothing.

I know it now : he went to the broken wire
And mended it—three quarters of an hour—
And then he would think that after all the slates
Were best bespoken now—six miles to go :
He would be about a mile when this began—
This wrath that will surely last till the Judgment
Day—

And that would make two hours till he reached the quarry—

But he went on, and the neighbours up and down
Were scared and went out searching with their lanterns,

Like lighted gnats searching the mines of hell.

Isn't it queer to see them out there dancing
When all the time he has gone a twelve mile journey—

And then this old woman came with her neighbour duty—

It's odd folk are,—

SARAH. It's a poor thing, spinning tales
When there's no faith in them.

ALICE. Hush, I have it all
Quite clearly now, in spite of that monster baying,—
Two hours to the quarry, hindered by the night,
Then half an hour to bargain, then two hours
For beating back, his boots heavy with snow,
Or a little longer—five hours and more all told—
It is nine o'clock—he went five hours ago,
Or a little more, so that's just how it works—
He should be coming now along the road,
Tired—we must warm the cakes again.

SARAH. Ay, warm them,
A dead man's heavy bearing.

[*The clock strikes nine.*

ALICE. That's the time
To bring him back, and we'll call the lanterns in—
He must be near by now—

[*A man is heard outside, kicking the snow off his boots.*

ALICE *opens the door, and AN OLD MAN comes in, carrying an unlit lantern.*

THE OLD MAN. My candle is spent.

[*JOAN takes the lantern and fits a new candle while they speak.*

ALICE. And you are going out again?
They have not found him?

THE OLD MAN. No. It's not easy there.

ALICE. Then he didn't go to the quarry after all.

JOAN. Because they hav'n't found him? That's no sign.

They couldn't if he went.

ALICE. Ah yes—how is it?—
He went, and they've been looking on the hills—
But have not found him. Yes—he must have gone.

He should be back. You should have found him for me.

SARAH. She is strange because of the trouble in the house.

I am old, and that is something.

ALICE. It is not that—
I am caught away from myself by the screaming thing

That scourges the hills. And yet in spite of that
I had reckoned all his doings since he went
Until his time for coming—but you came—
You came instead. That is not right.

THE OLD MAN [*taking the lantern and lighting it*].
We'll send

Across to the quarry now—

ALICE.

It is no use—

He'll not have gone.

THE OLD MAN. The night is full of tricks,
But another hour will have ferreted all the hill.

[*He goes out.*]

SARAH. Simon who took his money down to
market,

And wouldn't change for a good sound fact of cattle,
Fingered his earnings till a hole was worn

And came to the house again with an empty bag.

Leave making tales, my girl, poor tales—they bring
no profit,

Keeping the truth outside, and breaking away

To a thimbleful of ash themselves. He is dead.

Think hard on that. When the old king of the
world

With the scourge and flail turns his strokes from the
wheat

On the goodman's floor and scars the goodman's
back,

It is no time to wince. Your man is dead.

And a day and a day make Adam's fall a story.

ALICE. Not down to the quarry—then—my little
Joan,

Do you know at all what a man becomes to a
woman?

How should you though? If a man should take

A patch of the barren hill and dig with his hands
And down and down till he came to marble and gold,
And labouring then for a dozen years or twenty
Should build a place finer than Solomon's hall
Till strangers with money to travel came to praise it,
And, when he had dug and hewn and spent his
years

To make it a wonder, should go, and be remembered
No more than an onion-pedlar in the street
By the gaping travellers, yet he might be glad,
If his heart was as big as a woman's, for the thing
he'd made,

The strong and lovely thing, knowing it risen
Out of his thought into the talk of the world.
That's how it is. A woman takes a mate,
And like the patient builder governs him
Into the goodman known through a countryside,
Or the wise friend that the neighbours will seek out,
And he, for all his love, may never know
How she has nourished the dear fine mastery
That bids him daily down the busy road
And leaves her by the hearth. And when he is dead
It comes to her that the strength she has given him
To make him a gallant figure among them all
Has been the thing that has filled her, and she lonely
Or gossiping with the folk, or about the house.

SARAH. When he is dead.

ALICE. Why should I think of that ?

I am crazed, I say, because of the madness loosed
And beating against the panes. He is not dead—

Behold me now crashing across the earth
To shake the colonies of antic men
Into a fear shall be a jest, my fellows !
And I measured myself against this bragging pride
Climbing step by step through the blinding riot
Of frozen flakes swung on the catâract wind,
My veins praising the tyranny that was matched
Against this poor ambitious body of mine.

ALICE. The storm is drenched with treachery and
sin—

It is not good to praise it.

THE STRANGER. You on the hills
Grow dulled, maybe, to the royalty that finds
In your crooked world a thousand splendid hours,
And a storm to you is but a hindered task
Or a wall for mending or a gap in the flock.
But I was strange among this gaiety
Plying black looms in a black firmament,
This joy that was spilt out of the iron heavens
Where pity is not bidden to the hearts
Of the immaculate gods. I was a dream,
A cold monotony suddenly thrust
Into a waking world of lusty change,
A wizened death elected from the waste
To strive and mate with eager lords of tumult.
Beauty was winged about me, darkling speed
Took pressure of earth and smote against my face ;
I rode upon the front of heroic hours,
And once was on the crest of the world's tide,
Unseared as the elements.—But he mastered me,

That god striking a star for holiday,
And filled himself with great barbaric laughter
To see me slink away.

ALICE. It is no god,
But brainless anger, a gaunt and evil thing
That blame can't reach.

THE STRANGER. Not all have eyes to see.—
I'm harsh with my words, but I come from a harsh
quarrel

With larger thews than man's.

ALICE. Stranger, I'd give
Comely words to any who knocks at the door.
You are welcome—but leave your praising of this
blight.

You safely gabbing of sly and cruel furies,
Like a child laughing before a cage of tigers.
You with your fancy talk of lords and gods
And your hero-veins—young man, do you know this
night

Is eating through my bones into the marrow,
And creeping round my brain till thought is dead,
And making my heart the oldest thing of any ?
Do you see those lights ?

THE STRANGER. They seemed odd moving there,
In a storm like this.

ALICE. A man is lost on the hills.

THE STRANGER. That's bad. But who?

ALICE. My man is lost on the hills.

SARAH. She has it now ; her man is dead on the hills.

THE STRANGER. I talked amiss, not knowing of trouble here.

But why should he be dead ?

ALICE. The woman is worn,
Her mind is worn, and she lives out of the world.
You ask at once as any wise man would.
I have told her and told and told that he's not
dead,

And my young sister, too, though but a girl,
Says it, and she has a head beyond her years.
He is lost for an hour, or maybe for a night,
But never dead. That is the way you think ?
It is waiting that steals your proper sense away ;
And then, although you know, you let in fear
Blaspheming the thing you know—it is waiting
to-night

In the midst of an idiot wrath drumming and
drumming

Like a plague of bees in swarm above your eyes.

I do not know—I have not any strength

To fathom it now, and there is none to tell me.

SARAH. She knows it all, though the thing is hard
to say.

ALICE. Have done ! Young stranger, you have
travelled the world

I think, or have grown learned in great cities,
And can tell the ways things go—is it not wrong
To say that a man because of an ugly night
Should perish on his home-ground ? He would find
a road

Out of a danger such as that, because
That is the way things happen—tell me now?

THE STRANGER. It is likely that he would.

ALICE. You hear that, Joan—
A traveller who has been in foreign dangers
And comes a scholar from a hundred cities
Says it is well, and that we must be patient.

THE STRANGER. No, I've not travelled, and I only
say a man
Knowing the hills would likely weather a storm.

ALICE. There, there—you must not take it back
again,
Because you know, and you have said it is well.

SARAH. They cut a stone that is like a small
church window,
And they carve a name and a line out of the
book,
And when that's done there is nothing then to
doubt.

*[The storm has suddenly cleared. The silence falls upon
them strangely, and there is a pause.]*

ALICE. It is spent at last. He will come from his
shelter now.

My dear—come soon. Set the kettle again.

[JOAN does so. There is another pause.]

I have my thought again. It is an end.
I am broken. There is no pity anywhere.

THE STRANGER. The lights are coming.

SARAH. The anger never bates,
But scourges us till time betrays the limbs,

And strikes the tongue, and puts pence on the eyes,
And leaves the latch for stranger hands to lift.

[The blackness beyond the window has given place to clear starlight on the hills. A NUMBER OF MEN with lanterns pass by. There is a knock : ALICE opens the door, and THE OLD MAN stands there with his lighted lantern. She looks at him, and neither speaks. She turns away to the table.]

ALICE. Why have we waited . . . all this time
. . . to know . . .

[Her sorrow breaks over her.]

THE END

A PARTING
GORDON BOTTOMLEY

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

THE MOTHER

THE DAUGHTER

A PARTING

THE MOTHER. Juliet, the clock is striking.

THE DAUGHTER [*unseen*]. O, no : not yet.

I need not leave until St. Margaret's strikes.

MOTHER. It is time now.

DAUGHTER. Has all the luggage gone ?

MOTHER. The old man fetched the last

At twenty minutes to four.

DAUGHTER. Shall I take the lantern ?

MOTHER. There is no need :

The moon has not quite set : the streets are empty.

DAUGHTER. Shall I put out the lamp ?

MOTHER. Leave it to me.

DAUGHTER. But . . . in the empty house ?

MOTHER. Come, Juliet, come.
[*To herself.*]

When her father died I saw how gentle words,
A footstep in the street, a mouse at the washboard
Stirred him to agony, as though his tension
Was all that he could bear. Now I know why.

DAUGHTER. Has my aunt come ?

MOTHER. She is not coming here.
She said that she would see you at the train.
St. Margaret's clock has struck. You must come now.

DAUGHTER [*as she appears in an inner doorway*]. But why is she not here ? . . . Mother, mother, Why are you not ready ? You are not even dressed. You never meant to see me go away.

MOTHER. It is still night, and frosty.
We can talk better here : and I am cold.

DAUGHTER. Nothing is left to say : but a little longer
We could have walked together and touched each other.

If I had been a son you would have come :
Why are women harder to their daughters ?

MOTHER. Perhaps because, being women, they trust them more
To understand, and not to need the truth
Tempering lest it hurt them and weaken love.

DAUGHTER. But we must feel, or never truly live ;
And if we feel we are hurt, in spite of understanding.
And I . . . I do not even understand.
We have only each other ; we are poor ; you are not strong :

And yet you send me away to a far country.
When I would not go you were unkind, to force me.
But can you do without me ? What will you do ?

MOTHER. Presently I shall fail. I am not to live,
As you must live and open out to life.
There is money to buy a nurse, but not to give
Life in its wonder, its illumination,
Its resource, its mercy, its transfiguration
To youth and youth's capacities——

DAUGHTER. O, why
Should you believe I can do less than you ?
I will not go. . . .

MOTHER. You will not make me grieve,
As for a year I have done, watching you
Using on me exquisite, unconscious
Delicacies of thought and manner and face
That should be seen and felt in other places
To bring you cherishing in youth and age :
And when your far-off friend would be your lover
And called to you, I knew that you must go.
And more : and more : I knew that I must send you.

DAUGHTER. Yes, you are beautiful. More beautiful
Than young and lovely women. I was unjust.
And yet I do not feel I understand :
You urged me to take with me the cherished things
That have been here with you longer than I——
The portrait and the porcelain, even the bed
That you and I have used. I should not dare
To take them from you : there are things among
them
That should be with you to the end. . . .

MOTHER. It was in my mind that I may not
remain here.
These things are all I have to give to you.
If you are far away they will be sold
One day, they are not worth returning for.
If you would take them I should be at ease
To know your eyes rest on them and remember.

DAUGHTER. You will leave here? You will not need the bed?

What do you mean? You must tell me what you mean.

Will you lodge in another's house?

I have not thought well enough of what must happen
When I go from you. You have promised me
You will not live alone: it is not enough,
I was too easily contented then.

MOTHER. My only dear, do not begin again.
You must go now: you are almost late. Juliet,
Hurry, kiss me and go.

DAUGHTER. I am crowded with understanding,
jostled and dazed.
Wait; wait; you must not more bewilder me
And take my judgment from me.
I know why you always dress in the other room,
And will not let me help you or be near.
There is something the matter with you, something
grave.

I will not leave you. No.

MOTHER. It is all well: and I shall be well
cared for.

DAUGHTER. 'Well cared for.' Now you tell me
all indeed.

No one ever uses just those words
Except with just one meaning. You will go
Into a comfortless place where sufferers go
For whom there is no healing. But you shall not;
I shall stay here.

[*She begins to take off her outdoor clothes.*]

MOTHER [*checking her*]. No, you may lose your lover.

DAUGHTER. He must wait.

MOTHER. He is very far away : and a long time
Has gone since last he saw you. He is good,
He has remembered you across the years
That dim, the waters that withdraw and hide,
Although he saw you ere your beauty came——
And never since. But in that loneliness
He thinks of a companion : and he waits.
If he is thwarted he may look aside
And see a present comfort. . . .

DAUGHTER. Let him fetch me, and respite both
of us.

Last night, as I was singing the Schumann song
Of the young bride to her mother, and with the
music
Crying ‘ Mother, Mother ’ out of my heart, I could
see

Myself upon my marriage-eve unfolding
My pale, pale wedding gown, and all the things
That go with it and follow it ; and I heard
Again the rustling tissue between the folds,
As in the twilight when your shaking fingers
Had smoothed and folded and for the last time
Laid your love within them : and I thought
While the brief song came from my moving lips
As from another’s lips ‘ I shall not hear
Myself say “ Mother, Mother ” when that hour

Has come for me, nor kneel by you all white
And shimmering and trembling, nor continue
These happy words as she did "Loving him,
I have learnt the greater way of loving you."
Strange hands will dress me : or I shall be alone.'
Let him fetch me, and until he has come
I can be with you, nurse you when the time
For that is with you, and on my marriage-morning
Lay my head in your lap and like the girl
In the song murmur 'Mother, Mother.' . . . O,
mother !

MOTHER. Fate is like this for us. All has been
settled :

To alter it is useless : we could only
Return to this when we are wise again.
Fate is sometimes one thing, sometimes another :
We do not settle it, but, when we will,
We have the gift to recognise its presence,
And, by accepting it, to further life
And the meaning of life which is more than our
desires.
We have taken your friend into our vision and
purpose,
And now we have a duty together to him. . . .
I have grown unused to early rising lately :
I must try to rest again, so do not keep me.
Juliet, if you cry I think I shall faint.

DAUGHTER. Do not come to the door in these thin
clothes :
It is too cold.

And, mother : send me the portrait—and other things

You wish me to have—while you can attend to them.

Come, O come. . . .

[*They take each other into their arms and kiss slowly : the DAUGHTER goes out without turning.*]

MOTHER [*going to the window*]. Dawn is not yet.

The night is long, the morning

Hides what it holds. So does another morning—

Or will it be another night like this

That is going on for ever in this heart ?

She crosses the moonlight now between the houses

Now she turns the corner : and is gone.

Perhaps she is late and will return. . . .

That is the train at the crossing : she has time.

She will return no more.

SMOKE-SCREENS

HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

PRIMROSE ASTON.

SUSAN MERRIDEW, *her Aunt.*

LUCY ASTON, *her Mother.*

CLARICE, *her Friend.*

TIME.—*The present.*

The fee for each and every representation of this play by amateurs is payable in advance to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2, or their authorised representatives, who, upon payment of the fee, will issue a licence for the performance to take place.

No performance may be given unless this licence has been obtained.

SMOKE-SCREENS

SCENE.—MRS. ASTON's sitting-room in a Kensington flat.

It is a woman's room, exhibiting no sign of masculine use, but, of course, that old theory that women don't care about comfort for themselves, but only for men, is thoroughly out of date. This is a comfortable, bright, lived-in room, furnished in charming good taste by a woman who, if not precisely wealthy, has not had to watch pennies when she decorated her sitting-room. The door is C., with a hall-backing behind it. The window is R., with curtains drawn. It isn't a bookish room, and the contents of the bookcase, R.C., are obviously novels, and not enough of them to fill the shelves. A table, down R., has 'Vogue' and 'The Tatler,' together with cigarette-box, ash-trays and match-holders. The principal furnishing of the L. wall is a cabinet gramophone and a small occasional table with a vase of flowers. A large settee is set diagonally down stage from L. below the gramophone to C. There are upholstered chairs with bright covers, and a pouf which is down C. The walls are modern, and, as modern painters know to their cost, modern walls don't call for pictures. The sconces of the electric lights are decorative on the walls; a standard-lamp helps, by its shade, to decorate the room. There is a mirror on the wall L.C.

As the CURTAIN rises, SUSAN, who is 50, selects a record and starts 'The Ride of the Valkyrie' on the gramophone. Then she goes to the bookcase, looking for a novel, inspecting one or two title-pages. The door opens violently, and it isn't closed, either, after PRIMROSE, who—she's 20—dashes in with her cloak on and begins a vehement search of the room. SUSAN's action might excite suspicion, though it doesn't. She turns off the gramophone and reaches a chair with evident relief, taking a novel with her.

PRIMROSE. You needn't turn that off for me.

SUSAN. You're giving so good an imitation of a wind-maiden yourself that—

PRIMROSE. Never mind, Aunt Susan. I'll be out in a minute. At least, I will if I can find that bag of mine. It's got my one and only lipstick in it.

SUSAN [*in armchair L. of the table*]. You couldn't go out without that. [*As PRIMROSE's back is conveniently turned she here exhibits the bag, then hides it again.*]

PRIMROSE. Go out naked? No, you may not think it, my dear, but I do pay some attention to the respectabilities. [*G., surveying the room.*] Oh, where is that——? [*She pauses, as if planning a campaign of search, and we notice her, in kindness to SUSAN, shutting her mouth tightly on a flow of very lively oaths.*]

SUSAN. You're out a great deal, Primrose.

PRIMROSE. Yes, I use London. [*Moving about,*

upending settee cushions in her search.] Can't imagine how you can come up from the country and sit still when you get here. You can read novels at Little Crampton.

SUSAN. I've a slight headache this evening.

PRIMROSE [*casually*]. Sorry.

SUSAN. You're not very sympathetic, my dear.

PRIMROSE. Personally I think minor ailments are the only true impropriety.

SUSAN. I should like a chance to talk to you. Couldn't you, now——

PRIMROSE. I'm afraid this isn't my evening for listening to the conversation of my aunt.

SUSAN [*suavely*]. We might make an appointment.

PRIMROSE. For what?

SUSAN. For our talk. Some time when your engagements permit. Could you suggest a convenient date?

PRIMROSE. I couldn't at the moment.

SUSAN. Won't you indulge me? I very much want just half an hour alone with you.

[PRIMROSE *interrupts her search and sits down on the R. arm of the settee, looking down at SUSAN, dominating her.*

PRIMROSE. I know you do. You've been here for a week, now, haven't you?

SUSAN. Yes.

PRIMROSE. You had about two looks at me, gasped in horror, and ever since you've been

manceuvring for a chance to tell me what you think about me. Am I right?

SUSAN. You're not absolutely wrong.

PRIMROSE [*rising*]. All right, Aunt. You shall have your talk. Not now——

SUSAN. Why not now?

PRIMROSE [*c.*]. Some time before you go home you can unleash your views of me. But not now. Not till I know you've thought over something I'm going to tell you.

SUSAN. Yes?

PRIMROSE. It isn't . . . it isn't particularly easy to be me. That's all, if you'll just think that over before we discuss my young life. [*She crosses to cigarette-box on table R. and lights a cigarette.*] Putrid things, these cigarettes of Mother's. They cost a fortune, and taste like all the sins of Asia.

SUSAN. Is that why you smoke them?

PRIMROSE. *I must smoke something, mustn't I?* Don't say you don't see the necessity. It's crude. I'm smoking this, my dear, because I've a packet of Player's in my bag and my bag's vanished.

[*LUCY enters, closing the door. She is 40, handsome, capable.*]

Have you seen it, Lucy? My bag.

LUCY. No.

PRIMROSE. Oh, gosh, I shall throw a temperament in a minute!

SUSAN. Will that find your bag?

PRIMROSE. It might explode something. My bag might be found in the ruins. You never know.

LUCY [*sitting on downstage end of settee*]. You do lose things, Primrose. I don't suppose you've noticed, but the habit of dropping things about is growing on you.

PRIMROSE [*startled*]. Is that true? Really?

LUCY. It seems to worry you.

PRIMROSE [c.]. Well, it indicates a state of mind. I mean, a girl can lose her reputation, and no harm's done.

SUSAN [*outraged*]. Oh, Primrose!

PRIMROSE. See Shakespeare on reputations, Aunt. Blowing bubbles. But losing a handbag's serious. All my girlish secrets are in that bag, and about three pounds cash. [*She moves up as if to recommence her search.*]

SUSAN. Then you'd better stay at home till you find it.

PRIMROSE. Oh? [*She turns and looks at SUSAN, whose self-consciousness is revealing.*] Oh, that's where it is! My dear Aunt Susan, you do have bright ideas. [*To her.*] Will you get up, or must I spill you on the floor?

[*SUSAN produces the bag. PRIMROSE, still retaining her cigarette, uses the lipstick.*]

Thank you. Thank you for striking this blow for decency. Now your well-loved niece need not go naked into the night with lips exposed to the bitter blast and the scandalised eyes of men. [*She goes up*

to the door and puts the cigarette in her mouth to free her hand to open it.]

LUCY. Need you go into the street smoking?

SUSAN. For heaven's sake, child, throw it away! You've said you didn't like it. [*She rises and goes up to her as if to wrest it from her.*]

PRIMROSE [*coolly ignoring SUSAN*]. One of yours, Lucy. It tastes like the morning after a bad, bad night in Port Said, but the Government's told us to be economical. It isn't economy to throw away a half-used cigarette. Don't wait up for me. [*Going, then over her shoulder.*] A latchkey's one of the contents of a handbag, Aunt Susan.

[*She goes out.*]

SUSAN [*returning to her chair and sitting before speaking*]. Is she never at home?

LUCY. Not often. [*She rises and crosses to cigarette-box on table R.*]

SUSAN. I told her I'd a headache.

LUCY [*pausing before lighting a cigarette*]. Have you a headache?

SUSAN. No. [*So LUCY lights up.*] But I thought she might offer to stay in if I said I had.

LUCY. Really? Have you noticed much of that angel-child stuff lately? [*She stands against the table R., looking down on SUSAN.*]

SUSAN. Well, I hope you know where she's going now.

LUCY. You mean she's going to the devil.

SUSAN. I hoped that, as her mother, you'd know

which station *en route* to the devil she's calling at to-night. Some night-club, I expect.

LUCY. I'm not in her confidence. Oh, stop looking complacent, Susan ! [*She crushes her cigarette out on the ash-tray.*]

SUSAN. I wasn't.

LUCY. Yes, you were. You're the lucky one. You've a husband you can put up with and two sons who haven't turned your hair grey. That's luck, at fifty.

SUSAN [*rising and touching Lucy's arm*]. Don't be bitter, my dear.

LUCY. I've only Primrose, and she—— [*She makes a gesture of hopelessness and crosses to settee.*]

SUSAN. She's going to let me talk to her.

LUCY. Oh ? Oh, try anything once ! [*She sits on settee.*] But if she won't heed me I . . . well, I'd almost prefer she wouldn't heed you.

[*SUSAN sits by LUCY on the settee. LUCY downstage and SUSAN upstage end.*]

SUSAN. Sometimes an outsider's view can——

LUCY. Sometimes I try to take an outside view of myself. I've made a mistake. Somewhere there's a bad mistake, or Primrose——

SUSAN. She's very young, Lucy.

LUCY. Oh, my dear, I know exactly what you think of her ! And of me for having let her become——

SUSAN. Lucy, what I think of you is a bit unusual from one sister to another. I think you're a

splendid woman. I think you've fought life like a heroine.

LUCY. Thank you, Susan. That's very sweet to hear. But I don't know. Can anyone fight life—successfully? Life's cunning, and it's underhand, and you fight straight yourself, and you fancy you're doing something about it that's rather fine, but life's a crook, and fights back crooked. Life's fighting back at me through Primrose.

SUSAN. I've got a difficult thing to say, Lucy.

LUCY. Oh, if we can put our finger on my mistake we needn't butter parsnips.

SUSAN. You see, you spoke just now with bitterness.

LUCY. I've cause for bitterness.

SUSAN. Yes, you've cause, and I'll go further. I feel you haven't the habit of bitterness. That's a compliment, Lucy. Still, habits break down sometimes, and what I want to know is this. It arises out of something Primrose said. I tried to speak to Primrose, and she cut me short. She asked if I thought it was easy to be her.

LUCY. Not easy to be her? She's my heiress.

SUSAN. You've done miracles to make her heiress to anything, let alone—— [*She looks round the room, indicating there's a lot to be heiress to.*] I suppose she knows everything?

LUCY. She knows I had to divorce her father.

SUSAN. She knows you refused alimony?

LUCY. I'd rather have scrubbed floors.

SUSAN. Oh, you did better than that ! What had you but a car that you could drive ? And you hired it out and drove it. And fifteen years later you own three garages and I don't know how many taxi-cabs. You beat the men at a man's own game.

LUCY. It's easy stuff, beating men.

[SUSAN rises, goes to the switch by the door and turns the lights out.

What are you doing ?

SUSAN [*in the dark*]. That's all I know about electricity. Turn a switch, and the lights go out. [*Turning the lights up again.*] Turn it the other way, and the lights go up.

LUCY. Yes ? But——

SUSAN [*coming down c.*]. There's an amazing lot of electricity at work in this house. Your kitchen's a sight. You turn a switch and let electricity do the things that used to make women slaves to household tasks. I think men invented all these gadgets. Men freed you for the career in which you've beaten other men. There's good in men, my dear.

LUCY. But, heavens, Susan, have I ever denied it ?

SUSAN. To Primrose ?

LUCY. Oh ! Are you telling me I let my career bolt with me ? I brought up taxi-cabs instead of bringing up my daughter ? Is that the idea ? Don't forget I had my living and Primrose's living to earn.

SUSAN. You'll admit one thing about Charles.

LUCY [*rising*]. Charles !

SUSAN. You'll admit he was a charming man.

LUCY. In the opinion of so many women he was.

SUSAN. Including Primrose's opinion?

LUCY. What?

SUSAN. One day it became necessary for you to explain to Primrose why she hadn't got a father round the house, as the other girls at school had.

[LUCY *gestures* SUSAN to sit. SUSAN sits in armchair R.C., LUCY sits on *pouf*.

LUCY. I'll tell you what I did do, Susan. I remembered from my own schooldays that schoolgirls are spiteful little beasts. So I made the most tactful inquiries, and Primrose went where I knew there were other girls whose parents had divorced. I did that so that she shouldn't feel unusual.

SUSAN. Good for you! But you told her, of course. And this is what I'm getting at. In telling her, did you say Charles was a charming man, if an impossible husband, or did you say that when the split came you loathed him so bitterly that your pride revolted against taking alimony from such a man?

LUCY. I had to justify myself to her. Susan, I had to make her see that mine wasn't one of those casual, light-hearted divorces.

SUSAN. I wonder if it isn't better to keep divorce light-hearted.

LUCY. Oh, the matter with you is you're in the flippant fifties! You're losing your grip on morals. Susan, do you think I've been such a blithering idiot

as to have brought my daughter up in the belief that all men are rotters?

SUSAN. In the belief that her father's a rotter—yes, you have, with the consequence that the child asks herself how much of her father's rotten nature has descended to her, and——

LUCY. He was a rotter. Oh, more fool I to have married him, but I'm not the first or the millionth woman to have been made a fool of by love. And if I was fooled by a rotter, what else was I to tell Primrose except that I was fooled by a rotter?

SUSAN. And what's her reaction to that? My mother's a fool. She let herself be fooled by my father, who's a scoundrel. I'm the offspring of a fool and a scoundrel, and I may as well enjoy myself on the way to the devil, because I'm bound to go there, anyhow.

LUCY [*rising, impatiently*]. I'm a fool, am I? Five minutes ago you said I was a heroine.

SUSAN. Heroines are heroines because they don't see side-issues.

LUCY. Primrose is not a side-issue. She's all I've got. Oh, I was a heroine because I turned out to work for my child, and a fool because I turned out to work for my child! You can't have it both ways, Susan. And I couldn't have it both ways, either. I couldn't be a domestic mother to my daughter while I was running a business.

SUSAN. Tell me this. You haven't raved to her against marriage?

LUCY. Rave? I never rave.

SUSAN. Very likely I don't mean all I say.

LUCY. Then you shouldn't say it. Upsetting me like this! [*She sits at upstage end of settee.*]

SUSAN. My dear, if a young girl's as rude to her aunt as Primrose was to me you can't blame the aunt for feeling sore.

LUCY. You've got to recognise, Susan, that they don't go in for being mannerly to-day. Each generation has its—its technique. This present lot pretends to be a generation of flinty-hearted gold-diggers, and I expect they are shocking to an aunt from the country with two immaculate sons of her own.

SUSAN [*quietly*]. If you're satisfied with Primrose, that's the way to treat me—as a meddling busybody.

LUCY [*looking straight out*]. I don't think anybody's satisfied, ever. We want our children to be our own immortality. They want to be themselves. They want to be left alone to be themselves.

SUSAN. Yes? That's philosophy, and soft at that. I've been speaking about an actual niece with a latchkey in her bag and a cigarette in her lips in the public street, and a talent for back-answers that might be in its right place if she were one of your taxi-cab drivers, but as she isn't, as she's nothing but an overdressed minx beyond the age when it's decent to spank her for her good, I'm going to try what a bit of old-fashioned commonsense will do to her. [*Rising, and saying half quizzically.*] For one thing, Lucy, you know what I'm in town for?

/ — —

LUCY. Well, to visit me.

SUSAN. Yes, with the object of inducing you to leave your money to the International Peace Society.

LUCY. To do what?

SUSAN. It's the greatest cause in the world, and I doubt if you've ever thought of it. [*Seriously.*] I doubt if you've ever thought of using the power of the purse over Primrose.

LUCY. Oh, I see!

SUSAN. Well, have you?

LUCY. Have I thought of dangling my will as a threat over Primrose? No! I haven't thought of doing anything so Victorian.

SUSAN. The Victorians had their points.

LUCY. The Victorians had their parents. Security was going to last for ever, so they treated their children harsh when young because they were going to be rich when old. Fitting children for life's battles by making sure nothing they could meet afterwards could be as hellish as what they'd had to meet in childhood. Nothing's secure to-day, so we let them have the best we can while the going's good. Give our children a better time than we had ourselves, and——

SUSAN. I see. Won't discipline her daughter. Just a beautiful, fatuous trust in the innate goodness of human nature.

LUCY. I've been married to Charles Aston. I've also established a business, and I met a lot of human

nature while I was doing it. I don't think you can tell me anything about human nature, Susan.

SUSAN. Then what's Primrose? The celestial exception, because you happen to be her mother?

LUCY. Oh, I know, I know! Scratch a mother and find—well, find a mother. I don't know if I'm right or wrong. Honestly, Susan, I don't know if Primrose is a mess, or just a nice kid with a hard modern surface.

SUSAN. Either way she'd stand improving.

LUCY. All right, then, try. Try, only don't blame me if she bites you.

[*The doorbell sounds off.*]

SUSAN. Oh, I hope that isn't a caller! [*Her hands go automatically to her hair.*]

[*LUCY rises and moves up to the door.*]

LUCY. You've got a one-way mind, Susan. I shouldn't object to a change of subject.

[*Exit to hall, returning in a moment with CLARICE.*]

Meantime SUSAN goes to mirror, smoothing her hair.

CLARICE [*chattering nervously*]. Yes, I knew Primrose was out. I wanted to see you, Mrs. Aston, if . . . [*She looks at SUSAN.*]

LUCY. You know my sister? Mrs. Merridew. [*She closes the door.*]

CLARICE. How do you do? [*Her nervousness increases.*]

LUCY. Cloak off? It's warm in here.

CLARICE. Thank you,

LUCY [*taking her cloak*]. That's a lovely dress.
[*She hangs cloak over chair up R.*]

CLARICE. Yes, it ought to calm me, I know. I mean, thanks awfully for being tactful, Mrs. Aston, but I . . . I . . .

LUCY [*putting her on settee*]. Sit down, Clarice.

CLARICE. Thank you.

[*LUCY sits beside her on settee, downstage end.*]

SUSAN [*still standing*]. There's been an accident. Primrose.

CLARICE. Oh, no ! At least, no. She isn't lying in broken bits under a car, or anything like that. [*To LUCY, with a sort of desperation.*] I wish you'd let me speak about my brother.

[*SUSAN tries to interrupt. LUCY waves her to sit.*]

SUSAN [*sits protestingly in armchair R.C.*]

LUCY. Certainly. If you want to speak about your brother you may speak about your brother. I haven't met him, have I ?

CLARICE. No. It's rather a shock to meet John. [*Earnestly, as if praising him.*] He's ugly. But I mean really, definitely ugly. He's known as the ugliest man in the Rugby football field, and that includes France. I don't know if you've ever seen France play ?

LUCY. No.

CLARICE. Nor Scotland ? Nor Ireland ? Some of the Irishmen aren't pretty.

LUCY [*dryly*]. I imagine International players are chosen for their play.

CLARICE [*with enthusiasm*]. Oh, of course, on the field John's just a hundred and ninety pounds of charging bull. That's where you ought to see him. [*She glances at SUSAN.*]

SUSAN. The next time I want to see a man who looks like a hundred and ninety pounds of bull I will.

CLARICE. You'll have a treat.

SUSAN. Plainly.

LUCY. Yes ; and in what way is the accident that has happened to Primrose connected with your brother ? Did he step on her foot ?

CLARICE. Oh, no ! As a matter of fact, John's given up trying to dance. That's what I'm pointing out, Mrs. Aston. He has none of the graces. He's absolutely devoid.

LUCY [*sharply*]. That's quite enough about your brother. Come back to Primrose. You've evidently come to tell me something about her, and if it isn't an accident——

CLARICE. She's as well as I am.

LUCY. I'm relieved. And now we've got that out of you, and now you've warmed up by chatting about this unnecessary brother of yours, perhaps you'll——

CLARICE. Oh, but he isn't unnecessary !

SUSAN. The girl's a fool about her brother.

CLARICE. No, I'm not. Girls are only fools about other girls' brothers.

LUCY. Very well, he's a necessary brother. He plays football remarkably, but——

CLARICE. He does other things than that. I don't think life ought to be all sport, and John doesn't either. He's one of the most successful advertising agents in London. And at his age, too !

LUCY. Oh, I've got it ! Now I have got it. Clarice, my dear, I don't see touts out of business hours, and as little as possible in them.

CLARICE. Touts ? What's a tout ?

LUCY. On this occasion she's an enterprising young lady who puts on her best frock and calls on me to try to get her brother the job of advertising my taxi-cabs.

CLARICE [*hotly, rising*]. If you think I've got a brother who'd ask his sister to do a thing like that——

LUCY. Then you came unasked. All Clarice's own invention.

CLARICE. I did not come unasked.

LUCY. I knew we should get at it. Your brother——

CLARICE. Mrs. Aston, my brother's a sportsman. I didn't come unasked, because Primrose asked me to come.

SUSAN [*rising*]. Oh ? Oh !

LUCY. What is it, Susan ?

SUSAN. Was there any special reason why Primrose asked you to come here and talk about your ugly brother ?

CLARICE. Well, he is ugly, Mrs. Merridew ;

there's no getting away from it. Not ugly plus charm. Just downright plumb homely ugliness. He's got a face like the full moon with bristles on the top of it. That's his hair, I mean. He's clean-shaven. He is clean, every way, but if you put a smudge on his nose it might improve it, because then it would be visible.

[*It is to be noted that she glances anxiously at the door.*]

LUCY [*dryly*]. Thank you. You have quite established the salient points about your brother.

CLARICE. You do get it, don't you? About as much charm as a hippopotamus. That's John.

LUCY [*grimly*]. We get it. [*She rises and remains standing down L.*] Now, Clarice, why?

CLARICE. Why? Well, that's how God made him. And no beauty parlour could do anything about a case like John's. They really couldn't.

SUSAN [*going to her*]. Oh, I could shake you! When my sister asked 'Why?' she meant——

[*Enter PRIMROSE.*]

CLARICE. Thank God! [*She escapes from SUSAN.*]

PRIMROSE. How far have you got?

CLARICE [*sinking on to the pouf*]. Drowning, my child. Just going down for the third time in ten feet of water.

SUSAN [*icily, sitting erect in armchair R.C.*]. What your friend has been doing, Primrose, is to paint with a wealth of offensive detail the repellent picture of her odious brother.

PRIMROSE [*laying a hand on CLARICE's shoulder*].

Thank you, my angel. Yes, he's a lout. He's a lamb, but he is a lout.

SUSAN. She said he's a bull.

PRIMROSE [*looking at LUCY*]. I'm going to marry him.

[*There is a slight pause. SUSAN grips the arms of her chair.*]

LUCY. My dear, that's—— [*She stops short.*]

CLARICE [*rising*]. I'd better drop out now.

PRIMROSE. Thanks, angel. You've done your bit. [*As CLARICE goes up.*] Don't go too far away.

[*CLARICE nods, gets her cloak and exit.*]

LUCY [*watching her go, then with a half-smile*]. Do I say, 'This is so sudden!'?

PRIMROSE. I don't care, Lucy. Oh, I know what it means to talk about marriage in this house! It's like talking about something decent people don't mention.

SUSAN [*to LUCY*]. I see. You have been bitter about it.

PRIMROSE [*ignoring SUSAN*]. I've been forced to give a lot of thought lately to the subject of marriage. I don't mind telling you I think marriage is a jolly fine institution.

LUCY. This brother of Clarice's——

PRIMROSE. Of course. I don't mean marriage in general. I mean marriage with John. He makes me feel all funny inside.

SUSAN. What an expression!

PRIMROSE. Love's an expressive thing. He hits me where I matter. That's love.

[LUCY sits on the settee. For the moment she is content that SUSAN shall distract PRIMROSE's attention.]

SUSAN. I can excuse a good deal in a girl who is evidently emotionally disturbed, but——

PRIMROSE. By the way, I'm sorry I was rude to you before I went out. I had to be.

SUSAN. Had to !

PRIMROSE. Well, you're not quite a fool, Aunt. [She leans against the upstage arm of the settee.]

SUSAN [humorously]. Dear me !

PRIMROSE. You were watching, and I didn't want to be watched. The cuttlefish, isn't it ?

SUSAN. The . . . is it ? I'm getting confused with so much animal kingdom. Lambs and bulls, and now——

PRIMROSE. The one that squirts out a flood of ink to hide it from attack. Like a smoke-screen. But I did realise I was being a pig.

SUSAN. Now a pig !

PRIMROSE. I was piggish about your headache. I'm sorry, and when I got out I saw we couldn't go on. I saw I absolutely had to have it out with Lucy about John, and so——

[LUCY looks at SUSAN.]

SUSAN. Shall I go ?

LUCY. Please, Susan.

[SUSAN rises, goes to the door, then turns.]

SUSAN. Try to be kind to each other.

[Exit SUSAN. *There is a pause. They look at each other. Then, tentatively, PRIMROSE hums a few bars of the 'Wedding March.'*

LUCY. That's childish, Primrose.

PRIMROSE. Is it? [*She looks at gramophone, goes to it and turns it on. It resumes 'The Ride of the Valkyrie.'*] Is that stormy enough?

LUCY [*rising*]. Please! We needn't say this with music.

[PRIMROSE turns off the gramophone. [*Looking straight out.*] Like something leaping on me. Something out of the dark.

PRIMROSE. No, Lucy, no! Things can be sprung on you out of sunshine. Happy things. [*She moves towards her, almost wheedling.*] Oh, I . . . I expect you feel you're awfully young to be a mother-in-law!

LUCY [*with a half-smile*]. Being tactful, are you?

PRIMROSE. No, you are young. But I did think sending Clarice was a fairly good effort in tact.

LUCY. I understood from Clarice that whatever her brother is, he isn't on the face of him a lady-killer.

PRIMROSE. He jolly well isn't! I've done my best, Lucy.

LUCY. In what way your best?

PRIMROSE. I've not insulted you. If I'd picked a charming man——

LUCY. Has some one told you your father was charming?

PRIMROSE. Some one? Every one but you. All my life.

LUCY. Oh, the busy talkers! The busy, busy talkers! [*She sits on the pouf, facing down stage.*] Well, what they say is true for once.

PRIMROSE. I'm going to lie down and look at the ceiling. [*She lies on the settee.*] Then I shan't be able to look at your face.

[*But the audience will, and LUCY's face, as PRIMROSE proceeds, should be worth watching.*]

I admire my mother more than I admire any woman on earth. My mother was once in love with a man called Charles, and I'm in love myself just now. Speaking as a woman in love, I don't see how my mother could have known Charles for what he was. I don't blame Charles, either.

LUCY [*an involuntary interruption*]. What!

PRIMROSE [*continuing evenly*]. Charles was born the way he was. Very likely he knew he wasn't a marrying man. But he met my mother, and of course he loved her, and of course the only way to get her was to marry her, and so he married her. Later she sent him away, and she had me. She had only me. These last weeks have been a tough time for me, because I fell in love, and I think my mother would prefer me to remain unmarried. My mother worked, and I didn't. I haven't the brains. I think I'm like Aunt Susan in one way. I'm a marrying woman. It's tough to be a marrying woman when you've found the man you want to

marry, and when you feel your mother's made an independent career that's a living protest against the necessity of marriage. But at least there's this. Are all men alike?

LUCY. What? Oh, no! All men are not alike.

PRIMROSE [*sitting up and putting her feet down on the floor*]. Thanks, Lucy. That's a lot from you. That's an awful lot. I think I know John. I may not know him really, because I'm in love with him. But listen, darling, if I'm making a mistake it's a different mistake from the one you made, because John's as different from Charles as two men can be. He doesn't broadcast charm. He's got an ugly mug. [*Tenderly.*] Of course, his smile is like little ripples in summer sunshine, [*fiercely*] and I'm not being sentimental, either.

LUCY [*not appearing to question it*]. No.

PRIMROSE [*rising and strolling over to the table*]. It was an accident that I fell in love with John. I didn't go man-hunting. But I do say, Lucy, if I'd fallen for—well, for a Charles, you'd have had the right to exert your influence—I mean every influence. But John's a happy accident.

LUCY [*nodding casually and rising*]. Pass me a cigarette.

PRIMROSE. Yes.

[*She gets a cigarette from the box on the table and lights it for her. LUCY watches her yearningly, but before the girl turns she has resumed her mask of indifference.*]

They do help when you're churned up, don't they? I've smoked a lot lately.

LUCY [*lightly*]. I'm not churned up.

PRIMROSE [*indignantly*]. Then you ought to be. You said it was something leaping on you out of the dark, anyhow.

LUCY. That was just a first reaction.

PRIMROSE. Perhaps I've been swelled-headed about what I meant to you.

[*Cigarette in mouth, LUCY lightly kicks the pouf towards the armchair R.C. Then she sits in the chair.*]

LUCY [*patting the pouf*]. Come and sit here, Primrose.

[PRIMROSE *sits on the pouf*.]

It's always a losing game to be a mother. You were a baby, and I lost my baby. Then you were a helpless child, and I lost her too, and gained a schoolgirl, half of you as dependent as ever you were, the other half a strange new creature with interests that I couldn't watch and share. Then you grew up, a little woman, frightened at first of womanhood, then used to it and confident about it. I'd lost you very far by then, Primrose, but, unlike other lonely mothers with an only child, I had no need to make a tragedy of it. I had my taxi-cabs. I'm not sure, and I wouldn't preach to others the gospel of hard work as the greatest thing in the world, but as you went from me, the taxi-cabs for their own sake, for the sake of the career they represented——

PRIMROSE [*rising, trying nicely to hide her disgust*]. They mean more to you than I do?

LUCY [*blowing out smoke before answering*]. They have their uses.

PRIMROSE. I've been an awful ass. Worrying like that. Nearly going barmy because I thought you'd— Oh, doesn't matter! [*Slight pause.*] John's here, Lucy. He's in the dining-room, and I expect the poor lamb's sweating himself into a decline because we both thought—

LUCY. I shall be very glad to see your future husband, Primrose.

PRIMROSE. Thanks. I'll bring him.

[*Exit. LUCY is still sitting. She has a half-smothered impulse to recall PRIMROSE after watching her go, and as the door closes she just lets out :*

LUCY. Prim . . . [*She shakes her head.*] Taxi-cabs! Taxi-cabs, and she believed me! [*Rising.*] She believed me. [*She draws smoke fiercely and exhales.*] The smoke-screen! [*Watching the door.*] But I'm behind the screen, you John. It's very simple, John. If you're not kind to Primrose I shall shoot you.

CURTAIN

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

LORD REDCHESTER

LADY REDCHESTER

THE HON. GUY SYDNEY

THE HON. LETTICE SYDNEY

THE HON. AND RIGHT REV. CHARLES SYDNEY,
Bishop of Redchester

PRESTON

THE ' WOLF '

Applications regarding Amateur Performances of this Play should be addressed to Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2.

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SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

TIME.—*Three o'clock on Christmas morning.*

SCENE.—*The Library of Tudor Manor, Redchester.*

Down right is a window with curtains drawn over it. Up on right is a fireplace. To the right of centre is a large safe let into the wall. At centre is a door, while on left stands a table with whisky and soda, glasses and boxes of cigars and cigarettes. There are half a dozen chairs disposed about the room and one or two old family portraits upon the walls. The stage is in darkness when the curtain rises.

After curtain is up a light flashes between the curtains that cover the window. Then one curtain is drawn stealthily back and the 'WOLF' enters. He is clad in tight-fitting, black knickerbockers and has a black cap on his head and a black mask over his eyes. He carries an electric torch in one hand and a bag in the other. He lets the torch travel over the room, finds the safe and deposits the bag beside it. He goes to door, and listens. Leaves door ajar and finds an electric switch by mantelpiece. He turns on an electric light over mantelpiece and looks at his watch. Then he examines safe and opens his

bag. He lays out a dozen burglar's tools and a lamp on the carpet. Lamp is connected with wire of a strong electric light. He also brings an automatic revolver from the bag and puts it on a chair close to him. He is fumbling at the safe when the HON. GUY SYDNEY enters the room. GUY wears pyjamas and slippers. He comes right in, but the burglar does not immediately notice him.

GUY. *What ho !*

WOLF [*leaping for automatic and pointing it at GUY*]. Hands up !

GUY [*putting up his hands*]. You're a burglar !

WOLF. What d'you think I was? A piano-tuner? Hands up, I say !

GUY. All right—all right ! The real thing, by Jove !

WOLF. I'm the ' Wolf '—so watch out. Sit there, and if you make a sound, I'll plug you.

GUY [*sitting in easy chair*]. My dear chap, we were only saying at dinner that nothing ever happens here. Now something has. D'you really mean you're that world-famous burglar, the ' Wolf ' ?

WOLF. Yes—I'm him.

GUY. Some Christmas for us—eh? People always say we're the oldest and dullest family in the county. Nothing ever happens to the Sydneys. We never run away with other men's wives, or their money, or anything. We never shine and we never go out—just glimmer century after century. We never

get into newspapers, we never even have accidents out hunting. And no burglars, no fires ; nothing but weddings and funerals. But now all's changed !

WOLF. Why are you here ? I'll swear you never heard me.

GUY. Not a sound. Merely a coincidence. Did myself rather well at dinner last night, got thirsty and wanted some soda-water. [*Looks at table.*]

WOLF. Hands up !

GUY. My dear chap, don't get nasty ; don't regard me as an enemy. You're manna in the wilderness—you are indeed. If you only knew how this will brighten our Christmas and wake us all up ! You've come to 'crack a crib' ? That's the technical term, isn't it ?

WOLF. D'you know the password of this safe ?

GUY. On my honour I don't, or you should be saved all the trouble possible. Only the Governor knows it. He's got the family Christmas presents in that safe. You've come for them, no doubt ?

WOLF. I have.

GUY. Well, go to it. He won't miss them. He can't help being enormously rich, you know. His fortune's like your revolver—automatic. Don't be huffy and silly. Let me put my hands down and give you a drink ?

WOLF. Any treachery and I'll plug you !

GUY [*getting up*]. My dear Wolf, a Sydney couldn't be treacherous. We're the most trustworthy family in England. Always ran dead straight

—always been faithful to King and Country since we fought against William the Conqueror and got downed. Rectitude is our strong suit ; that's why we're so dull. This is pre-war whisky ; you'll like it. [*Mixes whisky and soda-water.*]

WOLF. Not too strong.

GUY [*bringing him the drink*]. And you really think you can break into that thing?

WOLF. The safe isn't built to beat me.

GUY. Stout fellow ! It's an American contraption. By the way, are you an American crook ? They rather specialise in swagger cracksmen over there.

WOLF. It's worth while in the States. When they catch you, if you're bad enough, you go to Sing Sing, and they give you flower gardens and bridge parties and theatricals and concerts and missionaries. They know how to take care of a great crook in America. But I'm English.

GUY. Glad of that. We've got to take a back seat at such a lot of things nowadays. [*Drinks soda-water.*]

WOLF. Don't talk so loud, and shut that door.

GUY [*lighting a cigarette*]. One minute before you begin. Would you mind if I called my sister ? This would be such a joy to her—brighten up her Christmas, you know. Living just outside a cathedral town is slow work for Lettice. You've no idea how she longs for a novelty now and again.

WOLF. If you try to pull my leg— [*picking up revolver*].

GUY. Far from it. The Sydneys never pull people's legs. I'm quite serious. She's a topping girl—quite one of your sort—a Communist and an Anarchist and a Bolshie at heart, though, of course, she's got to hide it. Loves reading about you. You'd be giving a lot of innocent pleasure if you let her see you at work. She's beautiful too, and only twenty-one. You'd like her.

WOLF. I never can say 'no' to beauty.

GUY. More can I. It's so commanding.

WOLF. Your word of honour, as a Sydney, that you'll call nobody else?

GUY. My word of honour. A Sydney can't lie. It's another of our fatal weaknesses and has kept us out of the law and politics and diplomacy—in fact, everything but the Church.

WOLF. Very well. Lettice may come.

GUY. Ta! Don't begin till we're back. The night is still young.

[Exit GUY. WOLF arranges his tools, lights a peculiar lamp, turns on electric light—wire not seen—and gets another drink.

He is pouring it out when PRESTON, the butler, enters in a dressing-gown. PRESTON carries a poker.

PRESTON. There! I thought I 'eard something. You dog!

[Advances with poker. The WOLF plunges at him and disarms him. He takes cord off PRESTON's dressing-gown and ties him into a chair.

WOLF. A word and I'll plug you !

PRESTON. Plug and be damned ! [*Shouts.*]
Thieves—murd—— !

[*The WOLF puts his hand over PRESTON's mouth, drags a large handkerchief from his pocket and gags PRESTON.*]

WOLF. You old, faithful family servants are the devil ! I didn't know there were any left.

[*Enter GUY and the HON. LETTICE SYDNEY. She is clad in a fantastic kimono.*]

GUY [*introducing her*]. My sister, Lettice—the famous Wolf, Kid. He's come for the Governor's Christmas presents.

LETTICE. Oh ! How brave of him ! How thrilling ! How d'you do ? [*Shakes hands.*] Do you think you can manage it ? [*Looks at safe.*]

GUY. Why, here's dear old Preston ! What on earth did you want to butt in for, old boy ? May I set him free, Wolf ? He'll be quiet now. He's only our butler.

LETTICE. I'm sure he thought he was doing his duty. He's old-fashioned and prejudiced about the division of property.

WOLF. Your sort divide property one way. I'm out to divide it another.

LETTICE. Exactly—quite right, Wolf. What wonderful tools ! Is this a jemmy ? [*WOLF explains them.*]

GUY [*liberating PRESTON*]. Better have a drink and go to bed, old son. This is the famous 'Wolf' ;

all the police in England are after him. And he's chosen us ! Isn't it sporting ?

PRESTON. He's come to rob the safe !

GUY. I know—the courage of the beggar ! I wish I had a nerve like that.

PRESTON. His Lordship——

LETTICE. Don't worry papa. He'll hear all about it to-morrow. It'll be the Christmas of his life !

WOLF. If you don't let me get on with it, I'll plug the lot of you.

LETTICE. That's quite all right, Wolf. Get on with it by all means. Be quiet, Preston ; if you won't go to bed, sit down and watch. This is the crowning point of our existence, if you could only see it. Nothing so wonderful ever happened before at the Manor.

PRESTON. It's a nightmare ! I'll wake up soon, I 'ope.

WOLF. You'll wake up in hell, if you don't shut your mouth. [*Picking up revolver.*]

GUY. You mustn't plug Preston. He'd die for us.

WOLF. Any more talk and he will. [*To LETTICE*] You haven't got the password ?

LETTICE. I wish I had. Only papa knows it.

GUY. Shall I ask him ?

LETTICE. No, no. I want to see the Wolf use these wonderful tools.

WOLF. I shall cut a hole in the cold steel.

PRESTON. You can't—it's crook-proof, you un'oly rip !

LETTICE. Order, Preston.

WOLF. More light—I want more light.

GUY. Right-o ! [*Switches on a blaze of electric light. The WOLF gets to work.*]

LETTICE. It's well worth while, Wolf. Papa's presents are priceless. He always lets himself go at Christmas.

PRESTON. This'll kill his lordship.

LETTICE. Don't be sentimental, Preston. Papa——

PRESTON. Thank Gord ! Here he is !

[*Enter LORD REDCHESTER. He wears a scarlet dressing-gown and a red silk nightcap. He is a jolly and jovial old man.*]

LORD R. Good powers, Guy ! And you, Lettice ! What have we here ! Who the deuce is this ?

GUY. It's the Wolf, Governor, the world-famous burglar all England is talking about !

LORD R. The Wolf come to our little place ! Surely not. Some impostor pretending to be the Wolf.

WOLF. I'm the Wolf all right.

LORD R. By Jove, you look as though you might be. A tough, dauntless devil I'll wager. Glad to know you. I'm Lord Redchester. [*Shakes hands.*]

LETTICE. And he's come to steal all your Christmas presents, papa—isn't it astounding of him ?

LORD R. How did he hear of 'em ?

WOLF. I have a thousand secret channels of information.

LORD R. Not Preston ! Never old Preston ?

PRESTON. Oh, my Gord !

LORD R. A joke, my dear fellow. I'm sure it wasn't you. The Wolf, eh ? And come to steal my Christmas gifts. Amazing !

WOLF [*with revolver*]. The password, and quick about it, or I'll plug you ! I can't mess about here all night.

LETTICE [*taking revolver from him, laughing*]. No, no, Wolf, that's not playing the game. If you're the real Wolf, I'm sure you'll soon break open the safe with your beautiful tools. You must think of us a little. Be sporting about it.

WOLF. Well—if you put it that way——

LORD R. Does he claim that he can open this safe without the password ?

LETTICE [*putting the revolver on the mantelpiece*]. I'm sure he can, papa. There's no safe in the world he can't open.

LORD R. Marvellous ! Something to talk about at last ! The cigars, Preston.

[PRESTON *fetches box of cigars from table*.]

LORD R. Take your time. This is the most interesting thing that has happened in my family since our third kennel-man ran away with my great aunt, Alicia. And that's two hundred years ago !

WOLF [*taking a cigar*]. A Corona ?

LORD R. [*helping himself*]. A double Corona, my dear fellow.

WOLF. If there's a catch in this, I'll plug the lot——

GUY. My dear Wolf, there's never a catch in anything the Sydneys do.

WOLF [*looking at cigar*]. Not doped?

LORD R. My tobacco doped! D'you hear that, Preston? [*To WOLF.*] It may amuse you to know that cigar cost half a guinea.

WOLF. A light, Preston.

[*PRESTON gives him a light.*]

LETTICE. Do you think I might wake mama? She'll never forgive us if she misses this. You know how she is always yearning for something to happen. It will be cruel, papa, to enjoy the Wolf without her.

LORD R. Thoughtful girl! Call your mother at once. And tell her to put on her thickest dressing-gown and a shawl.

[*Exit LETTICE.*]

LORD R. [*to the WOLF*]. I suppose you seldom have an appreciative audience on these occasions? If you could only do your astounding feats publicly, you'd make a fortune.

WOLF. I've made a fortune all right.

LORD R. No doubt, no doubt. Just going on for the sake of the sport. If I excelled at anything, which I don't, I should hate to give it up.

WOLF. What's this little lot worth?

[*Points to safe.*]

LORD R. Say eight thousand.

WOLF. Good !

GUY [*examining tools*]. All the best steel—eh ?

WOLF. Only use the best.

LORD R. Quite right. I always say ‘the best is good enough for me.’

GUY. Where shall you cut the hole ?

WOLF. I cut the hole with my oxyhydrogen blow-pipe—here.

[*Chalks a round in safe.*]

GUY. Nothing we can do to help you ?

WOLF. No. I work single-handed. If you’ll just sit down out of the way ! And no larks, mind.

GUY. Chairs, Preston.

[*PRESTON fetches chairs and arranges them in a semi-circle.*]

PRESTON. I ’ope you’ll excuse me, my lord. If this is a entertainment, I’ll go and put on my clothes.

LORD R. Do, Preston. I don’t like you in negligé—seems unnatural. But not a word to a soul, mind. Don’t wake anybody.

PRESTON [*aside*]. Oh, my Gord !—and Christmas morning and all !

[*Exit PRESTON. The WOLF begins to work.*]

LORD R. Preston has no feeling for romance—his only fault.

WOLF [*mopping his forehead*]. A spot of whisky.

[*GUY gives it to him.*]

LORD R. That's right. Catch the spirit of the season. I never thought I should enjoy a Christmas as much as this. If anybody had said there was a novelty in store for the Sydneys I shouldn't have believed them.

GUY. The Governor has an almost morbid craving for a bit of fun, you know.

WOLF. Has he? Well, some people are easily amused.

[Enter LETTICE and LADY REDCHESTER. *Her Ladyship wears a showy cap and dressing-gown. She might have a boa round her neck and possibly a pair of woollen gloves. She carries a lorgnette.*

LADY R. My dear Redchester, is it true?

LORD R. Look at him!

LADY R. [examining WOLF]. The terror of England! And under our roof! How nice of him! How do you do?

GUY. He's showing us how he does.

WOLF. And I'd do a darned sight better if there wasn't so much talk. Sit down and stow it.

LORD R. Hush, everybody!

LETTICE. Let's sing to him gently—a Christmas carol. 'Good King Wenceslas,' papa.

[*They sing.*

WOLF. Shut down on that! Silence, please.

LORD R. [*aside to LADY R.*]. Called for my Christmas presents.

LADY R. A new sort of Santa Claus.

LORD R. [*laughing loudly*]. Good, Sophy, good.

Did you hear that, Wolf? You're a new sort of Santa Claus !

[*They laugh.*]

WOLF. As long as you're all pleased. Where's my automatic ?

LETTICE. Here it is. I put it on the mantelpiece.
[*Gives it to him.*]

GUY. Never like it far from your hand, I expect ?

WOLF. Now this light will go through cold steel as though it were butter.

LADY R. Take care, then, and don't burn yourself.

LETTICE. I'll give you first aid if you do.

LADY R. One minute—how Charles would love this ! He's so interested in the criminal classes.

WOLF. There ain't no criminal classes, any more than virtuous classes. The rogues and the rulers may both come from the gutter, or the Palace. A man can be in the House of Commons to-day and the House of Detention to-morrow, can't he ?

LADY R. You're a great thinker, I see. But do let Charles come.

WOLF. Who's Charles ? This ain't a music hall turn, you know.

LORD R. You needn't mind Charles. Only my brother—quite harmless. The Bishop of Redchester as a matter of fact.

WOLF. I don't like the clergy.

LADY R. More does he—finds them most difficult and lawless.

LETTICE. You'll love Uncle Charles—everybody does. Call him, Guy. He may not approve, but he won't criticise. He never criticises anybody ; and never does anything, but just sits on the fence and prays for everybody.

GUY. He'll hate losing his Christmas present.

LORD R. By Jove, he will ! But it doesn't matter a button. I'll get him another. His life's so monotonous. It will be something for him to talk to the Dean and Chapter about.

GUY. Right-o !

[Exit GUY.]

WOLF [*who has been working blow-pipe*]. You see the solid steel is yielding under the terrific heat of the oxyhydrogen.

LORD R. Famous ! So it is ! I must get one—might be useful. Where d'you buy 'em ?

WOLF. A professional secret ; but I dare say I could send you one anonymously.

LORD R. Do, my dear fellow.

LETTICE [*to* LADY R.]. An enemy of society, mama, a bitter, sleepless enemy of society.

LADY R. Quite right—if he really knows what society is.

WOLF. Ah ! I'm up against something new here !

[*They all bend forward.*]

LORD R. [*springing up*]. Eh ! Another novelty ? Some American Invention, I expect. Don't let it beat you !

WOLF. Sit down—and stop dancing about.

There's too much fuss here. [*He is worried and examines safe.*]

LORD R. Sorry. [*Returns to seat.*] Anxious work—eh? Want your wits about you. I never had any myself, but I respect you brainy fellows tremendously.

[*Enter GUY and the BISHOP OF REDCHESTER. The latter wears a purple dressing-gown and a black biretta on his head. He looks distinctly clerical.*]

LETTICE. The famous Wolf, Uncle Charles.

LORD R. The Wolf has honoured our little fold, Charles! Think of his finding out Tudor Manor!

BISHOP. And why—why has this notorious person found out Tudor Manor?

WOLF [*at safe, worried*]. Why d'you think? To ask for a blessing?

BISHOP. I will bless you if you desire it; but not while you endeavour to destroy Lord Redchester's new family safe and steal his family gifts.

WOLF [*taking his revolver*]. Cut it out. Any more back answers and I'll plug you.

LORD R. Don't worry him, Charles. He's got his hands full.

WOLF [*back at safe*]. One of these damned Yankee puzzle-boxes that make you wish Columbus had never been born.

LADY R. You're not accustomed to an audience, of course.

WOLF. I'll have an audience of 'stiffs' if you don't dry up.

BISHOP. May I speak?

WOLF. No ! Shut your face !

LADY R. Be quiet, Charles.

BISHOP. I'll be quiet till he's finished. Then, as a lost sheep, it will be my duty to save him.

LETTICE. A lost sheep in wolf's clothing !

WOLF. 'Wolves do change their hair, but not their hearts.'

BISHOP. A classical quotation ! You have known happier days, my poor fellow.

WOLF. Yes, and happier nights.

LORD R. Don't say that. Wait till you collar the swag. [*To the rest.*] He's got a grand haul, you know. I'd bought a magnificent jade necklace for you, Sophy.

LADY R. You darling !

LORD R. A diamond tiara for Lettice—the one you admired in Bond Street, my treasure.

LETTICE. Oh ! You angel, papa !

LORD R. A gold cigarette case for Guy—with a cheque in it.

GUY. You brick, Governor !

LORD R. And a new crosier for Charles—an episcopal crook—not your sort of crook, Wolf. A magnificent crosier set with astounding jewels. You'll love it.

BISHOP. My dear fellow ! How did you guess ? You never come to the cathedral. But it is true, the Redchester crosier is quite unworthy of us. I much want a handsome one for great occasions.

WOLF [*who has been working and failing*]. This

infernal thing beats me ! I can't get in ! It's a new metal. The oxyhydrogen won't touch it !

LADY R. Oh dear !

GUY. ' If at first you can't succeed—— '

[*The WOLF stands back and stares at the safe.*]

LETTICE. He's tried so hard, papa. It'll ruin his Christmas if he fails.

WOLF. A new metal, I tell you—a dirty Yankee trick ! Blast the States, that's what I say. Why couldn't you be patriotic and buy an English safe ?

LORD R. To tell you the truth I felt doubtful at the time. We stick to home-made things as a rule, though they are so inferior.

LADY R. Tell him the password, Redchester. He's done his best. We don't want to ruin his Christmas.

BISHOP. Make him promise not to take the crosier !

LETTICE. No, that's not fair, Uncle Charles. The Wolf always makes a clean sweep. That's what he's here for.

WOLF [*takes up revolver*]. Just so. A clean sweep I make. The password quick, or I plug you all ! [*Whirls revolver.*]

LORD R. Don't spoil it—don't be rude and violent ! Put that thing down. I'd always intended to give you the password if you failed. Be bright, be sensible. Remember the day ! The password is ' Sophy.'

LADY R. Always thinking of me !

[*The WOLF goes to safe and in a moment has it open.*]

[Enter PRESTON dressed as butler.

PRESTON. Is there anything your lordship is pleased to want ?

WOLF. A sack for the swag, Preston. All stand back if you value your lives !

LORD R. A cricket bag will be better—easier to carry. One of the cricket bags, Preston.

[PRESTON lifts his eyes to the ceiling and goes off.

WOLF. Now I'll see if you were talking through your hat.

GUY. My dear chap, a Sydney never talks through his hat.

WOLF. I'll see. [*Brings out a parcel from safe.*]

LORD R. That was to have been Lady Redchester's Christmas gift.

[WOLF opens jewel-case and reveals a jade necklace with enormous beads as big as plover's eggs.

LADY R. Redchester ! How glorious ! I didn't know there was such a jade necklace in the world.

WOLF. More did I !

LORD R. There isn't another ! It belonged to the late Empress of China. I sent to China for it.

LETTICE. Do let mama just try it on, Wolf. They'd go so beautifully with her pink dressing-gown.

LADY R. Yes—yes—let me throw them round my neck for a moment, dear Wolf.

WOLF. No tricks, mind. [*Gives necklace to LETTICE, who puts them round LADY REDCHESTER'S throat.*] Any foul play and I'll play her ladyship.

LORD R. You mustn't do that. Keep calm. You're among friends. Believe me, you can trust her.

[*They all applaud the necklace.*]

BISHOP. Magnificent, Sophy ! You set them off superbly.

LORD R. [*delighted*]. One of my successes—eh ?

WOLF. They make her look younger.

LADY R. They do—I feel they do !

WOLF. And they make me feel younger. Worth a thousand, I'll bet.

LORD R. More, my boy, more !

[*The WOLF fetches out another large jewel-case from the safe.*]

LETTICE. It's like dipping into a bran tub, isn't it, Wolf ?

LORD R. That's the tiara, Lettice.

[*PRESTON returns with a cricket bag.*]

BISHOP [*aside to PRESTON*]. He proposes to take everything, Preston—the new episcopal crosier and everything !

PRESTON. Who'll take him ? That's what I want to know.

LETTICE [*on seeing the tiara, which is a gorgeous affair of glittering diamonds, kisses LORD R.*]. Oh, papa, how heavenly of you !

BISHOP [*to WOLF*]. Does not this innocent maiden's happiness touch you ?

WOLF. Cut it out. I'm here to do the touching.

LADY R. Let her try it on, Wolf—just once.

LETTICE. Do let me, Wolf—only for a moment.

WOLF [*giving her the tiara*]. Be quick, then. Can't stop here playing about all night. What's the time, Preston?

PRESTON [*consulting watch*]. Half after five.

GUY. There's no workmen's trains this morning. But perhaps you've ordered a 'special'?

WOLF. You watch out, my lad! Any more sauce and I'll plug you. I come and go on a motor bike.

GUY. Of course—you would. Rather bad roads, I'm afraid.

WOLF. You're right. Worst roads in England.

BISHOP [*who has helped LADY REDCHESTER to put on LETTICE's tiara*]. Exquisite! Amazing gems. What fire! What lustre!

LETTICE. Do you like it, Wolf?

WOLF. A touch to the left—that's right. Pretty tidy shiners. You can wear 'em for five minutes, then I'm off. Now for another dip.

LADY R. The iron nerve of the man!

LORD R. Isn't he wonderful? Napoleonic, Sophy!

BISHOP [*to LADY R.*]. One feels there ought to be some way of circumventing him.

LADY R. Nobody has ever been known to circumvent the Wolf, Charles.

LORD R. [*as WOLF reveals an absurdly large, golden cigarette case*]. That's right; that is Guy's cigarette case.

GUY. My dear Governor ! What a dainty little masterpiece !

LETTICE. Why ! I could pack a dress in that, papa !

LORD R. Don't forget the cheque.

WOLF [*opening case and looking at cheque*]. A thousand quid—eh ? What a father ! If I'd had a father like that—I might have been a very different man.

LORD R. But not so wonderful.

BISHOP. It's never too late to mend. Make a beginning to-night.

GUY. Let me have a squint at it. Cheque's no good to you anyway.

[*Takes cigarette case.*]

WOLF. It will be when you've signed it. A pen and ink, Preston. No tricks, mind—or——

[*PRESTON goes off.*]

GUY [*examining cigarette case*]. The arms and crest and motto and everything !

WOLF. Got a motto, have you ?

BISHOP. The family motto. 'Nec elata, nec dejecta.' Which means, 'Neither elated nor cast down.'

WOLF. Well, if you ain't cast down after this morning's work, I'll forgive you. It's a soft job like this that makes my life worth while.

LADY R. So glad !

WOLF [*going to safe*]. What's this ? [*Brings out a long case.*] A fishing rod ?

LORD R. The crosier—allow me. [*Takes case, opens it and brings out a wonderful, golden, Bishop's crook. It is very large and studded with enormous gems. He gives it to the BISHOP.*]

LADY R. It suits you exactly, Charles ! It might have been made for you.

LORD R. It was.

LETTICE. Gold always suits Uncle Charles.

WOLF. A flashy bit, sure enough. Real stones ? Real gold ?

LORD R. Would a Sydney give his Bishop brother sham ones, think you ?

[PRESTON returns with pen, ink and blotting-paper. He puts them on the table beside whisky and soda.

LETTICE. Oh, Preston, just look at Uncle Charles !

PRESTON [*to WOLF*]. Don't that make you want to go on your knees, you bad man ?

WOLF. Sign that cheque, Guy, right now. Then one more drink and I'm off. Now, ladies, please.

LADY R. One moment, my dear, good Wolf. You know I can't help feeling a *wee* bit of sentiment about this necklace. I'm an old woman and may not live to enjoy another Christmas such as this. I feel such wonderful things can never happen again. And if the necklace goes, it's all spoiled. [*Guy gives the WOLF a drink.*] If you take it away from me, you'll look back on this happy morning and feel—oh so sorry—so full of remorse !

LORD R. [*to WOLF*]. I was afraid she'd begin to worry when it came to the point.

WOLF. Business is business.

LADY R. Then forget all about business for once. If you take my necklace, you'll look back and feel that you'd let business come before pleasure ; and that's always such a silly thing to do. You had a mother once——

LORD R. And a clever one——

WOLF. Not a word against my mother !

LADY R. Indeed, no. She must have been a proud woman. But think if somebody had stolen her jade necklace—if you had seen tears in her old eyes on Christmas morning. Relent, dear Wolf—for your mother's sake, let me keep the necklace.

WOLF. Cut it out ! The necklace—or—[*revolver*].

LADY R. [*taking it off*]. Well, I call it simply horrid of you. The papers say you are always nice to ladies—even old ones.

WOLF [*taking necklace and putting it in cricket bag*]. Ain't I been nice ? Dammy, you people don't know your luck. You might have been lying dead in a row—if it weren't Christmas morning.

GUY. By Jove—so we might !

LORD R. A terrific experience !

WOLF. The tiara, Lettice, and no more soft soap, please. It don't cut no ice with me.

LETTICE. Yes, the tiara. But do think twice about the tiara, Wolf. You don't really want it, do you ? [*Putting her arms round his shoulders.*] No nice man ever wears diamonds. So yield, just this once, and make me a friend for life. Do let me keep them.

BISHOP. A true and lifelong friend is better than diamonds.

LETTICE. Yes, and Uncle Charles's crosier is so much more in your line. If I was your daughter—just think—you'd love me to wear a tiara then.

LADY R. I expect he has a horrid, greedy daughter like himself.

WOLF. I've got to work for my wife and family, ain't I ! Work's work.

LETTICE. But not to-day. Not on Christmas morning ! Everyone takes a holiday to-day. Do be Christmassy and kind-hearted, and then you'll feel so happy and pleased with yourself.

BISHOP. I dare say he has a heart of gold really.

WOLF. Cut it out !

PRESTON [*aside*]. I wish I could, you devil !

LORD R. Order, Preston !

LETTICE. Let me owe my Christmas rejoicings entirely to you ! And when I hear you rob other people, then I'll always stick up for you and say they deserved it.

BISHOP. A good act is never forgotten—it never dies. What, after all, are these treasures, my poor Wolf, compared with those you might win if you reform and join the ranks of the trustworthy, honourable and virtuous ? Let this glad Anniversary—

WOLF. Stow it ! [*To LETTICE*] D'you want me to abandon my craft and start keeping rabbits ?

GUY. Have some of ours. We've got millions.

WOLF. The tiara, or I'll take it.

LETTICE [*giving it to him*]. You're a cad—that's what you are—an utter bounder ! I hate you !

WOLF [*putting tiara in cricket bag*]. And not the only one, my lady bird.

LADY R. What are all you men about to see us robbed in this way ?

LORD R. My dear Sophy, where's your sense of humour ? A terrific experience—the event of a lifetime. Do try to appreciate it !

WOLF. The gold portmanteau, Guy.

GUY. All right—all right. [*Hands it over.*] Let me keep the cheque—for luck—eh ?

WOLF. The cheque, too—and if it's stopped, I come back and plug the family.

[*GUY hands over the cheque.*]

LORD R. Well worth the money—marvellous—Napoleonic !

WOLF. And now the crosier, Bishop. It'll be morning before I hop it.

BISHOP. It is the morning, my dear fellow. Hark ! What do I hear ? Open the window, Preston.

[*PRESTON draws curtains and throws open the window. A dim, white light. Bells are heard faintly chiming in the distance.*]

LADY R. The dear old cathedral bells.

LETTICE. Ringing in dear old Christmas morning !

BISHOP. Again the glad tidings of peace and goodwill to man are whispering in our ears. Again

we lift up our hearts and renew our faith and trust, both in heaven and our fellow creatures. Again the message of love, charity, benevolence comes to us with the gracious Christmas dawn—to tell us of the beauty of self-denial, of the well-laden board and generous vintage, of good gifts—taken and given—of——

WOLF. The crook, and look slippy !

BISHOP. The Christmas bells, Wolf.

WOLF. The Christmas bills, Bishop. I've got an expensive family and rather expensive tastes myself, I may tell you. [*Takes crosier and puts it into cricket bag.*]

LORD R. [*delighted, to* LADY R.]. Too much, even for Charles.

LADY R. [*to* BISHOP]. Can nothing be done ?

BISHOP. Yes, I have a trump card up my sleeve.

LADY R. Play it, then, for goodness sake !

BISHOP. Don't strap up that bag for a moment. Listen to me. You might do much better than that—much better. I'm sure your conscience will always prick you if you take those trifles when you might secure a huge fortune instead.

WOLF. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, old top !

BISHOP. My dear friend, I know a bush with a magnificent bird in it, which you could secure with no trouble whatever.

WOLF [*to* PRESTON]. Pack up my hand-bag, Preston.

[PRESTON *collects tools and lamp from floor and puts them in the WOLF's bag.*

WOLF [*to* BISHOP]. My turkey's waiting for me at home.

BISHOP. But what about a turkey worth half a million?

WOLF. Where? [*Takes another cigar.*]

BISHOP. Listen, and I'll tell you. Have you heard of Lord Wallaby, the Australian multi-millionaire?

WOLF. Who hasn't?

BISHOP. He is now our next door neighbour and has just secured a Tudor mansion and enormous estate, three miles from here. Our dear old cathedral is tumbling down and I have invited Lord Wallaby to rebuild it. He absolutely declines to do so, and now Providence has evidently sent you to punish him for his impiety. He is worth ten millions, and being a vulgar creature, very fond of display, he exhibits a part of this wealth in a service of astounding gold plate on his dining-room sideboard. It is said to be worth two hundred thousand pounds. Then, in his drawing-room, there stands a cabinet containing five hundred small, quite portable pieces of old china, each worth over a thousand pounds.

WOLF. Now you're talking.

BISHOP. I am. We are acquainted with the Wallabys. We knew the place quite well—before their time—decent people lived there once.

GUY. I know it inside out. There's a little

window on the right side of the main entrance you could walk through.

BISHOP. The grand point is this. The Wallabys are newcomers—just settling in—and people just settling into a new house never think of burglars.

WOLF. That's right. You might be one of us yourself.

LORD R. The Wallabys dine with us to-night. Wallaby can never eat anything that isn't cooked by a French chef, and his has run away, so we take pity on the man and he's coming to try ours.

WOLF. Coming here to-night?

BISHOP. Exactly. The whole family. And the servants all live at the other end of the mansion, and they will be keeping Christmas, you understand. From eight till eleven the place is at your mercy.

WOLF. Sounds good enough.

LADY R. Quite! And then, instead of a mere few thousand pounds, you will make very likely a hundred thousand.

BISHOP. More. With his incomparable skill and audacity, he will do far better than that. [*To the WOLF.*] But you see the position, of course? If you take the contents of that cricket bag, we shall tell Lord Wallaby immediately after breakfast that you have done so. Then he will make the necessary preparations and the opportunity of a lifetime is lost. But if you prefer these trifling mementoes to the priceless Wallaby collection, you will not be the wonderful man I take you for.

GUY. We would lend you our touring car to get the booty to town.

WOLF. Thanks ; but I'll make my own arrangements. Not a whisper to the Wallabys, mind.

LORD R. The word of a Sydney, my dear fellow. Not a whisper !

WOLF. Right ho ! It's good enough. I trust you. [*Opening bag.*] Here you are, girls ! Here's your 'hold-all,' Guy ; and there's the Bishop's little lot. And mind this : break faith and I come back and plug—— [*Holds all the presents.*]

GUY. We couldn't break faith, my dear chap. The Sydneys are faithful unto death.

WOLF. My Christmas presents—see ? [*Gives the presents back.*]

LADY R. He was dear Santa Claus, after all ! [*She and LETTICE put on their jewels. BISHOP bows and regains his crosier.*]

WOLF. I shan't want the cricket bag, Preston. [*To LORD R.*] Here's a keepsake for you, too—my automatic. It isn't loaded.

LORD R. My dear fellow—a noble curio ! An heirloom ! But I'm robbing you ?

WOLF. I've got plenty more. So long then. To-night, mind. And don't you let the Wallabys hop home again till after eleven o'clock. Keep 'em here.

LETTICE. We will.

GUY. Remember. The little window beside the main entrance—left of the portico, behind a holly

bush. Then through the hall and the old armour and stuff to dining-room for gold plate—third door on left—and drawing-room for curios in cabinet beside the fireplace—second door on right.

WOLF [*making a note*]. Right-o ! That lets me out then.

[*Goes to window.*]

LORD R. A ladder, Preston.

WOLF. Cat burglars don't want ladders. [*Half out of window.*]

LADY R. [*shaking hands*]. Good-bye. We shall never forget you.

LETTICE [*shaking hands*]. Good-bye, dear Wolf ! Do take care of yourself !

GUY [*shaking hands*]. Call at the Sports Club some day and let me put you up for membership.

BISHOP [*shaking hands*]. Come to the cathedral when you are at leisure. You really ought to turn over a new leaf after to-night.

WOLF. And don't none of you say no more hard words of the Wolf.

[*Sinks out of sight. They look out of the window.*]

ALL. We won't ! We won't ! [*Looking out of window.*] A merry Christmas !

WOLF [*outside*]. And a 'appy New Year !

LORD R. [*to PRESTON*]. Run out and see he has petrol for his machine and anything else he may need, Preston.

PRESTON. My Lord !

LORD R. At once, Preston, or I'll plug you !

[*Exit PRESTON. LADY REDCHESTER comes back from window.*

LETTICE [*waves her hand out of window, then comes in*]. He's gone, papa !

BISHOP. Thus we see how Providence never forgets the Sydneys.

LORD R. Grand fellow ! Something to talk about at last !

CURTAIN

LOVE AND HOW TO CURE IT

THORNTON WILDER

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

ROWENA.

LINDA.

JOEY.

ARTHUR.

The fee for each and every representation of this play by amateurs is One Guinea, payable in advance to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C. 2, or their authorised representatives, who, upon payment of the fee, will issue a licence for the performance to take place.

No performance may be given unless this licence has been obtained.

LOVE AND HOW TO CURE IT

The stage of the Tivoli Palace of Music, Soho, London, April, 1895.

The stage is dark save for a gas-jet forward left and an oil lamp on a table at the back right. Bare, dark, dusty and cold.

LINDA, dressed in a white ballet dress, is practising steps and bending exercises. She is a beautiful, impersonal, remote, almost sullen girl of barely sixteen.

At the table in the distance sits JOEY, a stout comedian, and ROWENA, a mature soubrette. JOEY is reading aloud from a pink theatrical and sporting weekly and ROWENA is darning a stocking. When they speak the touch of cockney in their diction is insufficiently compensated by touches of exaggerated elegance.

There is silence for a time, broken only by the undertone of the reading and the whispered counting of LINDA at her practice. Then :

ROWENA [*calling to LINDA*]. They've put off the rehearsal. Mark my words. It's after half-past eight now. They must have got word to the others somehow. Or else we understood the day wrong.—Go on, Joey.

[*He reads for a few minutes, then ROWENA calls again.* Linda, the paper says Majorie FitzMaurice has an engagement. An Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves company that Moss has collected for Folkestone, Brighton and the piers. She must have got better.—You'd better take a rest, dearie. You'll be all blowed.—Go on, Joey, that's a good boy.

LINDA [*gravely describing an arc waist-high with her toe*]. It's nine o'clock. I can hear the chimes.

[*Apparently JOEY has finished the paper. He stretches and yawns. ROWENA puts down her work, picks up her chair and brings it toward the footlights, and starts firmly supervising LINDA's movements.*

ROWENA. One, two, three; one, two, three. Whatever are you doing with your hands, child? Madame Angellelli didn't teach you anything like that. Bend them back like you was discovering a flower by surprise. That's right.—Upsidaisy! That's the way.—Now that's enough kicks for one night. If you must do any more, just stick to the knee-highs. [*She yawns and pats her yawn.*] There's no rehearsal. We might just as well go home. It was all a mistake somewhere.

LINDA [*almost upside-down*]. No, no. I don't want to go home. Besides, I'm hungry. Get Joey to go round the corner and buy some fish and chips.

ROWENA. Goodness! I never saw such an eater. Well, I have two kippers here I was going to set on for breakfast. [*Calling.*] Joey, there's a stove downstairs still, isn't there?

JOEY. Yes.

ROWENA [to LINDA]. There you are ! We could have a little supper and ask Joey. I have a packet of tea in my bag. How would you like that, angel ?

LINDA. Lovely.

ROWENA. Joey, how would you like a little supper on the stage with kipper and tea and everything nice ?

JOEY. Like it ! I'm that starved I could eat bones and all. Wot's more, I'll cook it for you. I'm the best little cooker of a kipper for a copper you could 'ope to see.

ROWENA [thoughtfully]. You could use that in a song some day, Joey.—Shall I let him cook it, Linda ?

LINDA. Yes, let him cook it.

JOEY. I'll just go next door and get a spoonful of butter. Wait a minute—wait a minute : A bit of butter's better for the biter.

ROWENA. Why, Joey, you're bursting with ideas to-night.—Here's sixpence. Get some milk for the tea, too. Put some hot water on as you go out and I'll be down in a minute to make the tea.

JOEY. Won't be a minute, my dears.

[*He hurries out. There is a pause. LINDA stops her exercises and examines attentively each of the soles of her slippers in turn.*]

ROWENA. Joey must have cooked thousands of kippers in his day. All those last years when his wife was ill he cooked everything for her. Good

old Joey ! He's all lost without her. And he wants me to talk about her all the time, only he doesn't want to bring her into the conversation first. You know. Henrietta de Vaux was wonderful, but I can't talk about her all the time. [*Another pause.*] Linda, whatever are you thinking about all the time ?

LINDA. Nothing.

ROWENA. Don't you say 'nothing.' Come now, tell your auntie : what is it you keep turning over in your mind all the time ?

LINDA [*indifferently*]. Well, almost nothing—except that I'm going to be shot any minute.

ROWENA. Don't say such things, dearie. No one's going to shoot. You ought to be ashamed to say such things.

LINDA [*pointing scornfully to the door*]. I bet he's out waiting in the street this very minute.

ROWENA. Why, he went back to his university, didn't he ? He's a student. They don't let them come to London whenever they want.

LINDA. Oh, I don't care. Let him shoot me. I wish I'd never seen him. What was he doing, anyhow, worming his way into Madame Angellelli's swarrays. He'd oughta stayed among his own people.

ROWENA. I'm going straight out into the street to see if he's there. I can get the police after him for hounding a poor girl so. What's his name ?

LINDA. Arthur Warburton. I tell you I don't care if he shoots me.

ROWENA [*sharply*]. Now I won't have you saying things like that! Now mind! If he's out there Joey'll go and get him and we'll have a talk. When did you see him last?

LINDA. Sunday. We had tea at Richmond and went boating on the river.

ROWENA. Did you let him kiss you?

LINDA. I let him kiss me once when we floated under some willow trees. And then he kept talking so hot-headed that I didn't let him kiss me again, and I liked him less and less. All the way back on the bus I didn't pay any attention to him; just looked into the street and said yes and no; and then I told him I was too busy to see him this week. I don't want to see him again.—Aunt Rowena, he breathes so hard.

ROWENA. He didn't look like he was rough and nasty.

LINDA. He's not rough and nasty. He just—suffers.

ROWENA. I know'm.

LINDA. Aunt Rowena, isn't there any way discovered to make a man get over loving you? Can it be cured?

[ROWENA *does not answer. She walks meditatively back to the table in the corner.*]

ROWENA. Give me a hand, will you, with this table? We'll bring it nearer to the gas jet. I'd

better go downstairs and see what Joey's doing to everything. [*They bring the table forward.*] Dearie, what makes you say such things? What makes you say he's thinking of shooting you?

LINDA. He looked all . . . all crazy and said I oughtn't to be alive. He said if I didn't marry him . . .

ROWENA. *Marry him!* He asked you to marry him? Linda, you are a funny girl not to tell me these things before. Why do you keep everything so secret, dearie?

LINDA. I didn't think that was a secret. I don't want to marry him.

ROWENA [*passing her thumb along her teeth and looking at LINDA narrowly*]. Well now, try and remember what he said about shooting.

LINDA. He was standing at the door saying good-bye. I was playing with the key in my hand to show him I was in a hurry to be done with him. He said he couldn't think of anything but me—that he couldn't live without me, and so on. Then he asked me was there someone else I loved instead of him? And I said no. And he said, how about the Italian fellow at Madame Angellelli's swarray? And I said no, not in a thousand years. He meant Mario. And then he started to cry and take on terrible.

ROWENA. I'll teach that young man a lesson. That's what I'll do.

LINDA. Then he was trembling all over, and he

took up the edge of my coat and cried : People like me ought not to be alive. Nature ought not to allow such soulless beauties like I.

[She has risen on her toes, holding out her arms, and has started drifting away with little rapid steps ; from the back of the stage she calls scornfully :

I ought not to be alive, he said. I ought not to be alive.

[Pause.

ROWENA. Someone's pounding on the street door down there. Joey must have dropped the latch.

LINDA. It's Arthur.

ROWENA. Don't be foolish.

LINDA. I know in my bones it's him.

[JOEY appears at the back.

JOEY. There's a gentleman to see you, Linda. Says his name is Warburton.

LINDA. Yes. Send him up.

JOEY. Kipper is almost ready. Water's boiling, Rowena. What are you going to do about this visitor ?

ROWENA. Listen, dearie, I want to look at this Arthur again. You ask him, pretty, to have supper with us.

LINDA. Oh, Aunt Rowena, I couldn't eat.

ROWENA. This is serious. This is serious, Linda. Now you ask him to supper and you send him around to the corner for some bitters. In the meantime I'll catch a minute to tell Joey how we must watch him.

LINDA. I don't care if he shoots me. It's nothing to me.

[In the gloom at the back ARTHUR appears. He is wearing an opera-hat and cape.]

ARTHUR *[who is very miserable, expects and dreads Linda's indifference, but hopes that some miraculous change of heart may occur any minute. Tentatively]*. Good evening, Linda.

LINDA. Hello, Arthur. Arthur, I want to introduce you to my aunt, Mrs. Rowena Stoker.

ARTHUR. It's a great pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Stoker. I hope I'm not intruding. I was just passing by and I thought . . . *[His voice trails off.]*

ROWENA. We thought there was going to be a rehearsal of the new panto we're engaged for, Mr. Warburton. But nobody's showed up, so like as not we mistook the day. Linda's just been practising a few steps for practice, haven't you, dovie?

LINDA *[by rote]*. Arthur, we were just going to have a little supper. We hope you'll have some with us. Just a kippered herring and some tea.

ARTHUR. That's awfully good of you. I've just come from dinner. But I hope you won't mind if I sit by you, Mrs. Stoker?

ROWENA. Suit yourself, I always say. It isn't very attractive in an empty theatre. But you must have something, oh yes.

LINDA. Perhaps you'd like to do us a favour, Arthur. Joey's downstairs doing the cooking and

can't go. Perhaps you'd like to go down to the corner and bring us a jug of ale and bitters?

ROWENA. I have a shilling here somewhere.

LINDA. Aunt Rowena, perhaps Arthur is dressed too grand to go to a pub. . . .

ROWENA. The pubs in this street is used to us coming in in all kinds of costumes, Mr. Warburton. They'll think you're rehearsing for a Society play.

ARTHUR [*who has refused the shilling, and is all feverish willingness*]. I'll only be a minute, Mrs. Stoker.

[*He hurries out.*]

ROWENA. The poor boy is off his head for sure. Makes me feel all *old* just to see him. But I imagine he's quite a nice young man when he's got his senses. But never mind, Linda, nobody wants you to marry anybody you don't want to marry.—Has he been drinking, dearie, or does he just look like that?

LINDA. He just looks like that.

[*Enter JOEY, with cups, knives, forks, etc.*]

JOEY. Where's the duke?

ROWENA. He's gone to the corner for some ale and bitters. Thank God, he's eaten already. Now, Joey, listen. This young man is off his head about Linda, crazy for sure. Now this is serious. Linda says he talks wild and might even be thinking of shooting her. [*JOEY whistles.*] Well, the papers are full of such things, Joey. And plays are full of it. It might be. It might be.

JOEY. Well, I've heard about such things, but it never happened in my family.

ROWENA. Just the same we got to take steps. Joey, I'll have him take his cape off. You take his coat downstairs and see if there's anything in the pocket.

JOEY. What in the pocket?

ROWENA. Why . . . one of those small guns.

LINDA. Yes, of course, there's one in his pocket. I know there is.

ROWENA. It would be in his cape, so as not to bulge his pockets. Listen, Joey, if there is a gun there, you take out the bullets, and then put the gun back into his pocket empty. See? Then bring the cape back again. If this boy is going to shoot Linda, he's going to shoot her to-night, so we can have a good heart-to-heart talk about it.

JOEY. Yes, and then call the police, that's what!

ROWENA. No, this is a thing police and prisons can't cure. Now, Joey, if you find a gun in his pocket and have done what I told you, you come back on the stage whistling one of your songs. Whistle your song about Bank Holiday : you know : *My holiday girl on a holiday bus.*

JOEY. Right-o.

ROWENA. Now, Linda, you act just natural. Let him have his murder and get it out of his system. Yes, you know, I like the boy and I don't hold it against him. When we're twenty-one years old we all have a few drops of crazy melodrama in us.

LINDA [*suddenly*]. Oh, I hate him, I 'ate 'im ! Why can't he let me be ?

ROWENA. Yes, yes. That's love. You see it everywhere.

LINDA [*on the verge of hysterics*]. Auntie, can't it be cured ? Can't you make him just forget me ?

ROWENA. Well, dovie, they say there are some ways. Some say you can make fun of him and mock him out of it. And some say you can show yourself up at your worst or pretend you're worse than you are. But I say there's only one way to cure that kind of love when its feverish and all upset. . . . [*She pauses, groping for her thought.*] Only love can cure love. Only a real . . . only a real, interested . . . [*She gives it up.*] It's all right, dearie. Don't you get jumpy. It's a lucky chance to get the thing cleared up. Only remember this : I like him. I like him. He's just somebody's boy that's not well for a few weeks.

LINDA. He breathes too hard.

[*Enter ARTHUR, followed by JOEY. ARTHUR's hands are laden with bundles and bottles.*]

ROWENA. Why, Mr. Warburton, I never see such a load. Whatever did you find to bring ? Fries, salami, and I don't know what all. This is a feast. Take off your coat, Mr. Warburton. Joey, help Mr. Warburton off with his coat. Take it and hang it on the peg downstairs.

ARTHUR [*with concern*]. I think I'll keep the coat, thanks.

ROWENA [*as JOEY attacks it*]. Oh, no, no. You won't need your coat. There's nothing worse than sitting about in a heavy coat.

[ARTHUR *follows it with his eyes, as JOEY bears it off*. But, Linda, you've been exercising. You slip that scarf about you, dearie, and draw up your chair. Well, this is going to be nice. What's nicer than friends sitting down to a bite? And extra nice for you, Mr. Warburton, because you ought to be in your university, or am I mistaken?

ARTHUR. Yes, I ought to be at Cambridge.

ROWENA. Fancy that! It must be exciting to break the rules so boldly. Ah well, life is so dull that it does us good every now and then to *make* a little excitement. Now, Mr. Warburton, you'll change your mind and have a little snack with us. A slice of your salami?

ARTHUR. I don't think I could eat anything. I'll have a little ale.

ROWENA [*busying herself over the table*]. That's right.

ARTHUR [*ventures a word to LINDA*]. Madame Angellelli is having a *soirée* on Thursday, Linda. Don't you go any more?

LINDA. No, I don't like them.

ARTHUR. I wondered where you were last Thursday. Madame Angellelli expected you every minute.

LINDA. I don't like them.

[*Silence.*

ROWENA. What can be keeping Joey over the kipper? Have you seen Joey on the stage, Mr. Warburton?—Joey Weston, he is.

ARTHUR. No, I don't think I have.

ROWENA. Oh, very fine he is. Quite the best comedian in the pantos. But surely you must have seen his wife. She was Henrietta de Vaux. She was the most popular soubrette in all England, and very famous she was. He lost her two years ago. Henrietta de Vaux. Everybody loved her. It was a terrible loss. Sh— Here he comes!

[Enter JOEY with the kipper and the tea. He is jubilantly whistling a tune, that presently breaks out into words: A holiday girl on a holiday bus.

What a noise you do make, Joey, for sure. Anybody'd think you were happy about something. Well, now, Mr. Warburton, you'll excuse us if we sit down and fall to.

[ARTHUR sits at the left turned towards them. JOEY faces the audience, with ROWENA and LINDA facing each other, ROWENA at his right and LINDA at his left.

JOEY. It's cold here, Rowena, after the kitchen.

ROWENA. Yes, it's colder than I thought for. Joey, go and get Mr. Warburton's coat for him. I think he'll want it after all.

ARTHUR. Yes, I'd better keep it by me.

[He follows JOEY to the door and takes the coat from him.

ROWENA [*while the men are at the door*]. How do you feel, dearie?

LINDA. I hate it. I wish I were home.

ROWENA. Joey, this is good. You're a good cook.

[*They eat absorbedly for a few moments ; then ROWENA gazes out into the vault of the dark theatre.*

Oh, this old theatre has seen some wonderful nights. I'll never forget you, Joey, in *Robinson Crusoe the Second*. I'll never forget you, standing right there and pretending you saw a ghost. I hurt myself laughing.

JOEY. No, it wasn't me. It was Henrietta. She sang *The Sultan of Bagdad* three hundred times in this very house. On these very same boards. Three hundred times the house went crazy when she sang the Houseboat song. They'd sit so quiet you'd think they were holding their breaths, and then they'd break out into shouts and cries. Henrietta de Vaux was my wife, Mr. Warburton. She was the best soubrette in England since Nell Gwynn, sir.

ROWENA. I can hear her now, Joey. She was as good a friend as she was a singer.

JOEY. After the show I would be waiting for her at the corner, Mr. Warburton. [*He points to the corner.*] Do you know the corner, sir?

ARTHUR [*fascinated*]. Yes.

JOEY. I did not always have an engagement and the manager did not think it right to have a husband

waiting in the theatre to take the soubrette home. So I waited for her at that corner. She slipped away from all that applause, sir, to go home with a husband who did not always have an engagement.

ROWENA. Joey, I won't have you saying that. You're one of the best comics in England!—Joey, you're tired. Rest yourself a bit.

JOEY. No, Rowena, I want to say this about her : she never felt her success. And she had a hundred ways of pretending that she was no success at all. 'Joey,' she'd say, 'I got it all wrong to-night.' And then she'd ask me how she should do it.

ROWENA. Do draw up your chair, Mr. Warburton, and have a bite for good feeling's sake. We're all friends here. Linda, put a piece of sausage on that bread for him with your own hands.

ARTHUR. Well, thanks, thank you very much.

JOEY [*with increasing impressiveness*]. And when she was ill, she knew that her coughing hurt me. And she'd suffer four times over trying to hold back her coughing. 'Cough, Henrietta,' I'd say, 'if it makes you more comfortable.' But no!—she'd act like I was the sick person that had to be taken care of. [*Turning on ARTHUR with gravity and force*] I read in the papers about people that shoot the persons they love. I don't know what to think. What is it but that they want to be noticed, noticed even if they must shoot to get noticed? It's themselves, it's themselves they love.

[JOEY stares at ARTHUR so hard that ARTHUR breathes

an all but involuntary 'Yes.' Then he rises abruptly and says :

ARTHUR. It's all right when there are two that love. But something's the matter, something's all wrong when one person wants to love like that and to give everything, and then isn't even noticed for it. It's just wasted.

JOEY. Wasted. None is wasted—what about the years when Henrietta was noticed as you call it by every one except me ? Oh, I was a gay young man ! Henrietta wasn't good enough for me.

ROWENA. Joey, you're tired.

JOEY. I did what I chose. I came and went. And she stood it all without saying anything. It was *me* that killed Henrietta long before she died.

ROWENA [*rising, sharply*]. Joey, you're not to say such things.

JOEY. It's true. What good is it for me to praise her now she's dead ? What good is it for me to love her now she's dead ? She loved me and I didn't notice her, and now this young man says that it was wasted. That's not enough. None is wasted.

[ROWENA *whispers urgently* to JOEY, then adds aloud :

ROWENA. Joey, come downstairs with me and help me open that old chest. I think we can find Henrietta's shield and spear from *The Palace of Ice* and other things. The lock's been broken for years.

JOEY [*sombrely*]. All right, Rowena, let's look.

ROWENA. We won't be a minute. You go on eating.

[They go out.]

ARTHUR. I won't trouble you any more, Linda. I want you to be happy, that's all.

LINDA. You don't trouble me, Arthur.

ARTHUR. What he said is true.—I wish you liked me, Linda. I mean I wish you liked me more. I wish I could prove to you that I'd do anything for you, that I could bring to you all that . . . he was describing. I won't be a trouble to you any more. *[He turns.]* I can prove it to you, Linda.—I've been waiting at that corner for hours, just walking up and down. And I'd planned, Linda, to prove that I couldn't live without you . . . and if you were going to be cold and . . . didn't like me, Linda, I was going to shoot myself here and now. . . . To prove to you *[he puts the revolver on the table]* . . . to prove to you . . . But you've all been so kind to me. And that . . . what Mr. Weston told about his wife. I think just loving isn't wasted. *[He weeps silently.]*

LINDA *[horrified]*. Arthur ! I wish you wouldn't !

ARTHUR. I imagine I'm . . . I'm young still.—Good-bye and thanks. Good-bye.

[He hurries out.]

[LINDA shudders with distaste ; peers at the revolver ; starts to walk about the room, and is presently sketching steps again.]

[JOEY and ROWENA return.]

ROWENA. Was that him that went out? What happened, Linda?

LINDA [*not interrupting her drill, indifferently*]. He said good-bye for ever. He left the gun to prove to me something or other. Thank you for nothing.

ROWENA. Linda, I hope you said a nice word to him.

LINDA. Thank you for nothing, I said.

ROWENA. Well, young lady, you're only sixteen. Wait till your turn comes. We'll have to take care of you then.

LINDA. Don't let's talk about it. It makes me tired. So hot and excited and breathing so hard. Mario would never act like that. Mario . . . Mario doesn't even seem to notice you when you're there. . . .

THE END

THE ROSE AND THE CROSS

CLIFFORD BAX

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

THE FIRST TELLER OF THE STORY

THE SECOND TELLER

MESSER FEDERIGO, *an old scholar*

GISELDA

PIA

FRANCESCA

THREE ENVOYS

DANCERS

PLACES :

RAVENNA, VENICE AND ROME

TIME :

THE EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

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THE ROSE AND THE CROSS

The audience having assembled in the studio or large room in which the play is to be presented, a bell is sounded. Enter, left, the 1ST TELLER, soberly gowned. She carries an old folio. Walking pensively across the front of the stage, she takes her stand before a big chair to the extreme right and bows to the audience.

The bell sounds again. Enter, left, the 2ND TELLER. She is similarly clothed and also carries a large volume. She takes the few steps that bring her to a chair on the extreme left, and standing before it she bows to the audience. Between them, at the back, is a curtained alcove.

1ST TELLER.

Welcome, O guests ! And may you go content
With what in these close walls we shall present.

Slight is our theme, for slight our homely stage,
And few our players to speak the verse or mime :
To such last corners has our hurrying age
Driven the delicate joy of spoken rhyme.

2ND TELLER.

A mountain eagle, clapped within a cage,
Perforce looks pitiful rather than sublime :

And what small room can hold Othello's rage ?

What roofed-in playhouse, Clytemnestra's crime?

Yet we dare hope that he whose thoughts are bent
On seeking truth, may count the time well spent.

[*They seat themselves.*]

PART ONE

1ST TELLER.

In grave Ravenna once there dwelt a man

Who, though his life now charred the candle-
stick,

Hoped still to find out how this world began,

And searched old books, both Greek and Arabic.

He found sage Averroes clear as light,

And Plato wrought no phrase he could not
parse ;

And often, too, he pondered day and night

The influence of the kind or cruel stars.

[*The curtain of the alcove is withdrawn, and reveals*

MESSER FEDERIGO sitting at a table and evidently
translating from a big book. FRANCESCA, seated
on a stool beside him, is writing what he dictates.

2ND TELLER.

Three daughters had he : last among those three,

Francesca. Civil warfare wracks her soul.

She cannot tell yet which may wiser be—

The life of liberty or of stern control.

[FRANCESCA rises and goes to one side. She opens a
small painted box.

Now, with intent to purchase fruit and wine,
One day she took their money-casket down,
And saw there many an astrologic sign
Or learned note—but not one silver crown.

[FRANCESCA goes to FEDERIGO, touches him on the
arm as he reads, and shows him the coinless box.]

1ST TELLER.

Her father paused : then, with a testy look
As though he deemed the subject poor and low,
Rebuked the girl, opened another book
And sealed his mind from what it would not
know.

2ND TELLER.

Then, as the town bells chimed the mid-day hour
Came her two sisters home, like night and day :
[Enter PIA and GISELDA, the latter, on their way to the
centre, imperiously pushing in front of PIA.]
One a pale star, and one a flaunting flower,—
Pia devout, Giselda frank and gay.
[FRANCESCA is now standing in front of the curtain, as
if at the door of her father's study. She shows the
box to her sisters.]

Francesca told her news, and while she spoke
Trembled to guess what answer each would
give ;

But Pia cried ' So has God loosed my yoke,'—

1ST TELLER.

Giselda ' Now, now am I free to live ! '
They curtsyed. Federigo raised his eyes ;
And first Giselda spoke, and in this wise. . . .

GISELDA.

So, then ! Your books have brought us down
Until we lack a single crown !
All the year I have worn this gown,—

And yet God made me fair.

Out on you all ! 'Tis time I shook
Aside the dust of map and book.

What ! Shall a girl of spirit brook

A life so lean and spare ?

Not I. To you I leave the Past :

The Present runs away too fast.

I mean to win some joy at last,

And when I want, I dare !

Beauty has honour, folk report,

In Venice, at the Doge's court ;

And thither now will I resort,

And seek my fortune there.

[MESSER FEDERIGO *frowns at her over his spectacles,*
then pats away her words as though they should not
be seriously considered. He addresses himself once
more to his book.

PIA [*to GISELDA*].

Sister, beware ! You lose or win

Eternity for the soul within.

While you have time, forswear the sin,

And God will understand.

GISELDA [*ignoring her*].

Francesca,—come ! How can you wait

For happiness in some far-off state ?

[FRANCESCA *smiles and shakes her head.*

My fame in love shall be so great,
The Pope shall kiss my hand.

[GISELDA turns her back on the scene, moves off left, and blows a kiss to them as she disappears. PIA steps forward and lays a hand on FEDERIGO's arm. He withdraws his eyes from his book with a gesture of exasperation.

PIA.

Father, I too must go my way :
For the whole world is wide astray,
And, looking down my soul to-day,
I saw with inward light
That nothing's worth a moment's thought
But God. The world of sense is nought,—
An evanescent plaything wrought
To hinder the soul's flight.

[FEDERIGO's attention wanders. His eyes fall upon a passage in his book and he ceases to heed PIA.

I must be gone. I want a cell
And candles and a convent-bell :
Nor shall I weep to say farewell
Because I choose aright.
Francesca, will you not depart
From idle verse and heathen chart ?

[FRANCESCA sighs and shakes her head.

Then I will go, and in my heart
Pray for you both to-night.

[PIA goes out. For a moment, FRANCESCA stands gazing after her, as though uncertain of herself : then returns to FEDERIGO who begins to nod over

his book. It grows dark, and FRANCESCA leads him out. His spectacles remain on the open book. The curtain closes.

PART TWO

1ST TELLER.

Next, we conjure you all to make belief
That half a year of prayer and amorous rhyme
Has joined the Past that, like a coral-reef,
Slowly accumulates the coming time.

[FRANCESCA, *wearing a dark cloak, enters slowly and goes up to the centre. She draws back the curtain, and gazing down at the books on the table, shows that she is passing through an ordeal of indecision.*

2ND TELLER.

Now the old scholar learns what none may read.
Elsewhere he is, and wanders, all astray,
Blindly exploring death : unless indeed
Angels with candles lit his upward way.
As for Francesca, now at last she cries
(A desperate Helen,—claimed by soul and sense) :

‘ To Venice, then ! The will within me dies,
And I grow torpid from mere abstinence.’
So, forth she fares, wide-armed for love and mirth
Surrendering to that Life which built the earth.

[FRANCESCA *goes out. The curtain closes.*

PART THREE

1ST TELLER.

Two selves at war with each other
Has man,—poor creature ! Forever
The soul in him tries to sever
The hold of the earth, his mother.

2ND TELLER.

For the life that his body ensheathes,
A gift of his parents at birth,
Is one with the life of the earth.
He shares it with all that breathes.

1ST TELLER.

And pleasant it is for a little,
Ignoring the soul's pretences,
To float on the tide of the senses,
Not caring a jot or tittle.

2ND TELLER.

But at last, if all go well,
The soul, there pent in the brain,
Will come for his kingship again,
And the body no longer rebel.

1ST TELLER.

Now, for a while our words will shut their wings
And yield before the sweetness of bow'd strings.
Let the old airs that float from string and bow
Build Venice town five hundred years ago.

[*The TWO TELLERS close their books. String-music.*

Enter GISELDA and FRANCESCA gaily attired and

with their arms about each other. They proceed to the centre of the stage.

[*The curtain opens and, in place of the scholar's table of books and astrological paraphernalia, discloses a bright throne. Here GISELDA seats herself, FRANCESCA sitting on the step at her feet. GISELDA claps her hands.*

[*A group of DANGERS, carrying bowls of fruit and garlands, trip towards her in single file. They then perform an ornate and sensuous dance, in the course of which they present their offerings to the sisters. An amphora of wine is brought in, and from this they fill the Venetian glasses of the principals.*

[*After a little while, enter THREE PAGES carrying gifts. GISELDA, desiring to examine the gifts, claps her hands, a sign at which tapers are brought.*

2ND TELLER.

Moored at Giselda's water-mirrored gate,
In gilded gondolas three lovers wait :
And here their envoys coming, gift in hand,
To find out if their suits are blessed or banned.

GISELDA.

Three are our lovers, then, to-night,
But only two are we ;
So one must go without delight.
Now, which one shall it be ?
I'll rend a rose and, flake by flake,
Scatter it round, and he

Among you that is last to take
Shall have not her nor me.

2ND TELLER.

So from her wreath Giselda, blushing not,
Drew a bright rose, and gave her love by
lot :

While, as though Heaven's dim door were left
ajar,

Francesca watched a little beckoning star.

[GISELDA *takes a rose and, rapidly tearing off the petals, presents the stripped flower to one of the Pages. She then rises, and standing in a square of candles, prepares to go. On the point of calling FRANCESCA, however, she sees that her sister's thoughts are remote. The curtain of the alcove is closed.*

GISELDA.

Why, sister, what has made you slack
The sails of joy? What holds you back?
You look so grave! Woe's me, alack,
Is life no longer sweet?

FRANCESCA.

Life, I have seen, is rich and good
Within your laughing sisterhood.
I would still share it, if I could,

But—it is incomplete.

I want the sea, and you the foam.
Farewell! My soul is turning home,
And in that holy house at Rome
I'll sit at Pia's feet.

GISELDA.

Poor fool ! You seek a hollow bliss :
Yet, since I love you, go with this—
My rose-wreath, and a long last kiss.
Henceforth we shall not meet.

[Shaking off her momentary melancholy, GISELDA signs to the Dancers who escort her out, carrying their tapers high. FRANCESCA remains for a while in the darkness : then, rising up, bows her head for an instant, and goes out by the opposite way.]

PART FOUR

2ND TELLER.

So did Francesca leave, without a sigh,
The rose-life of the natural self to die :
But now, at Rome, began to feel new loss,—
Bowed at a grim and never-flowering Cross.

[The curtain is drawn back. It shows a plain background, and PIA in nun's habit kneeling at a crucifix on either side of which a lighted candle stands.]

Pia discerned her faltering, and all night
Wove round her spells of prayer by candlelight :
Then, rising up, found on the stones a flower,
And shuddered,—seeing that nothing has more
power

To drug the soul than beauty. So she hid
The rose within a box, and closed the lid.

[Enter FRANCESCA, in the costume of a lay-sister.]

1ST TELLER.

A hair will tip the balance up or down,
And so Francesca, coming tired and late
From giving alms throughout the poorer town,
Looked for her flower, and said, learning its
fate—

FRANCESCA.

Why have you shut my flower away ?

PIA.

Is that a hardship, then ?

FRANCESCA.

The world is shared by Night and Day :
So should it be with men.

PIA.

A wise traveller bears no weight ;
And if we climb at all,
Foolish it is to shed the great
And not to shed the small.

FRANCESCA.

Giselda was afraid of death :
You are ashamed of life,—
Ashamed, I think, to draw your breath,
You child of man and wife.

[PIA bows her head.

Something in each is jarred. I see
That I must part from you. . . .

PIA.

Sister, what comfort can there be—
Hovering between the two ?

FRANCESCA.

None. But a man should live without
Dishonouring sense or soul.
A way there is, I cannot doubt,
Of making both one whole.

PIA.

Always the one will suffer loss—

FRANCESCA.

The world, in that belief,
And burning either Rose or Cross,
Consumes away for grief.

[PIA reverently detaches the crucifix from the wall, and gives it to FRANCESCA. FRANCESCA moves to kiss her, but PIA turns away and kneels down in prayer. FRANCESCA goes out. The curtain closes.]

PART FIVE

1ST TELLER.

No wise law was ever made,
No city well and truly laid,
Unless the maker drew his plan
After much thought on God and man.

2ND TELLER.

For nothing is there, great or small,
But leads you to the soul of all,
And every stone and every tree
Whispers of Eternity.

[FRANCESCA is discovered within the alcove, seated at her father's table. The books upon it are closed,

*and on them lie the crucifix and the rose which
FRANCESCA contemplates in abstraction.*

1ST TELLER.

So to Ravenna town she comes again,
And overhears her riven mind discuss
That problem twice tackled by man in vain :
And her two selves began debating thus—

1ST TELLER.

What is the vaunted soul ? It is, I fear,
The shadow thrown by what we see and hear.

2ND TELLER.

What power is that through which we hear and
see ?

1ST TELLER.

Life,—common life.

2ND TELLER.

The wings are not the bee.

1ST TELLER.

All comes from sense : and, like a blinded lark,
If these are blocked, the ' immortal ' soul is dark.

2ND TELLER.

What bids man seek beyond the world of sense ?

1ST TELLER.

Our sad perception of its impermanence.

2ND TELLER.

That you call ' sad ' ?

1ST TELLER.

If beauty but endured !

2ND TELLER.

Man will be sick until that thought is cured.

1ST TELLER.

How ?

2ND TELLER.

We must learn to love the flight in things,
And praise God that he gave all beauty wings.
For nought would perish but that it is possessed
By the on-rushing soul that cannot rest.
Death is a meteor's trail, and what is dead
Shows only where through Time the Eternal sped.
[FRANCESCA rises, taking in one hand the crucifix, and
in the other the rose.

FRANCESCA.

Now have I seen how far we strayed
From wisdom when we looked for joy
In fleeting shapes that either cloy
Or, at their full of sweetness, fade :
But also, what ill count we made,
Crying in scorn and fear ' Destroy
The world of sense. It is a toy
With which too long the soul has played.'
Strange is the doctrine that I see :
The soul is great, the senses fair,
And by their grace, and that alone,
May the Immortal quick in me,
Whatever form it take for throne,
Greet the Immortal everywhere.

[The TWO TELLERS rise, the 2ND at the word 'soul,'
the 1ST at the word 'senses,' and leaving their
books upon their chairs, move slowly to the centre.
There they kiss one another, as in homage, while

FRANCESCA *hangs the crucifix upon the wall at the back and over it places the rose. The curtain closes.*]

1ST TELLER.

Friends, we have done. There is no more to tell.

2ND TELLER [*to* 1ST].

Come,—it grows late.

[*to the audience*]

And may you all fare well.

[*They move out hand in hand.*]

PUNCH AND GO

A LITTLE COMEDY

JOHN GALSWORTHY

“Orpheus with his lute made trees
And the mountain tops that freeze. . . .”

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

JAMES G. FRUST, *The Boss*.

E. BLEWITT VANE, *The Producer*.

MR. FORESON, *The Stage Manager*.

'ELECTRICS,' *The Electrician*.

'PROPS,' *The Property Man*.

HERBERT, *The Call Boy*.

IN THE PLAY WITHIN THE PLAY

GUY TOONE, *The Professor*.

VANESSA HELLGROVE, *The Wife*.

GEORGE FLEETWAY, *Orpheus*.

MAUDE HOPKINS, *The Faun*.

SCENE.—*The Stage of a Theatre*.

Action continuous, though the curtain is momentarily lowered according to that action.

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PUNCH AND GO

The Scene is the stage of the theatre set for the dress rehearsal of the little play : ' Orpheus with his Lute.' The curtain is up and the audience, though present, is not supposed to be. The set scene represents the end section of a room, with wide French windows, Back Centre, fully opened on to an apple orchard in bloom. The Back Wall with these French windows, is set only about ten feet from the footlights, and the rest of the stage is orchard. What is visible of the room would indicate the study of a writing man of culture.¹ In the wall, Stage Left, is a curtained opening, across which the curtain is half drawn. Stage Right of the French windows is a large armchair turned rather towards the window, with a book rest attached, on which is a volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, while on a stool alongside are writing materials such as a man requires when he writes with a pad on his knees. On a little table close by is a reading-lamp with a dark green shade. A crude light from the floats makes the stage stare ; the only person on it is MR. FORESON,

¹ *Note.*—If found advantageous for scenic purposes, this section of room can be changed to a broad verandah or porch with pillars supporting its roof.

the stage manager, who is standing in the centre looking upwards as if waiting for someone to speak. He is a short, broad man, rather blank, and fatal. From the back of the auditorium, or from an empty box, whichever is most convenient, the producer MR. BLEWITT VANE, a man of about thirty-four, with his hair brushed back, speaks.

VANE. Mr. Foreson ?

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. We'll do that lighting again.

[FORESON *walks straight off the stage into the wings Right. A pause.*

Mr. Foreson ! [*Crescendo*] Mr. Foreson.

[FORESON *walks on again from Right and shades his eyes.*

VANE. For Goodness sake, stand by ! We'll do that lighting again. Check your floats.

FORESON [*speaking up into the prompt wings*].
Electrics !

VOICE OF ELECTRICS. Hallo !

FORESON. Give it us again. Check your floats.

[*The floats go down, and there is a sudden blinding glare of blue lights, in which FORESON looks particularly ghastly.*

VANE. Great Scott ! What the blazes ! Mr. Foreson !

[FORESON *walks straight out into the wings Left. Crescendo.*] Mr. Foreson !

FORESON [*re-appearing*]. Sir ?

VANE. Tell Miller to come down.

FORESON. Electrics ! Mr. Blewitt Vane wants to speak to you. Come down !

VANE. Tell Herbert to sit in that chair.

[FORESON *walks straight out into the Right wings.*
Mr. Foreson !

FORESON. [*Re-appearing*]. Sir ?

VANE. Don't go off the stage. [FORESON *mutters.*
[ELECTRICS *appears from the wings, Stage Left. He is*
a dark, thin-faced man with rather spikey hair.

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr. Vane ?

VANE. Look !

ELECTRICS. That's what I'd got marked, Mr. Vane.

VANE. Once for all, what I want is the orchard in full moonlight, *and the room dark except for the reading-lamp.* Cut off your front battens.

[ELECTRICS *withdraws Left.* FORESON *walks off the stage into the Right wings.*

Mr. Foreson !

FORESON [*re-appearing*]. Sir ?

VANE. See this marked right. Now, come on with it ! I want to get some beauty into this !

[*While he is speaking, HERBERT, the call boy, appears from the wings Right, a mercurial youth of about sixteen with a wide mouth.*

FORESON [*maliciously*]. Here you are, then, Mr. Vane. Herbert, sit in that chair.

[HERBERT *sits in the armchair with an air of perfect peace.*

VANE. Now ! *[All the lights go out.*
[In a wail] Great Scott !

[A throaty chuckle from FORESON in the darkness. The light dances up, flickers, shifts, grows steady, falling on the orchard outside. The reading lamp darts alight and a piercing little glare from it strikes into the auditorium away from HERBERT.

[In a terrible voice] Mr. Foreson.

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. Look—at—that—shade !

[FORESON mutters, walks up to it and turns it round so that the light shines on HERBERT's legs.

On his face, on his face !

[FORESON turns the light accordingly.

FORESON. Is that what you want, Mr. Vane ?

VANE. Yes. Now, mark that !

FORESON *[up into wings Right]*. Electrics !

ELECTRICS. Hallo !

FORESON. Mark that !

[The blue suddenly becomes amber.

VANE. My God !

[The blue returns. All is steady. HERBERT is seen diverting himself with an imaginary cigar.

Mr. Foreson.

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. Ask him if he's got that ?

FORESON. Have you got that ?

ELECTRICS. Yes.

VANE. Now pass to the change. Take your floats off altogether.

FORESON [*calling up*]. Floats out. [*They go out.*]

VANE. Cut off that lamp. [*The lamp goes out.*]
Put a little amber in your back batten. Mark that !
Now pass to the end. Mr Foreson !

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. Black out !

FORESON [*calling up*]. Black out !

[*The lights go out.*]

VANE. Give us your first lighting—lamp on. And then the two changes. Quick as you can. Put some pep into it. Mr. Foreson !

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. Stand for me where Miss Hellgrove comes in.

[*FORESON crosses to the window.*]

No, no !—by the curtain.

[*FORESON takes his stand by the curtain : and suddenly the three lighting effects are rendered quickly and with miraculous exactness.*]

Good ! Leave it at that. We'll begin. Mr Foreson, send up to Mr. Frust.

[*He moves from the auditorium and ascends on to the stage, by some steps stage Right.*]

FORESON. Herb. ! Call the boss, and tell beginners to stand by. Sharp now !

[*HERBERT gets out of the chair, and goes off Right.*]

[*FORESON is going off Left as VANE mounts the stage.*]

VANE. Mr. Foreson.

FORESON [*re-appearing*]. Sir ?

VANE. I want ' Props.'

FORESON [*in a stentorian voice*] ' Props ! '

[*A rather moth-eaten man appears through the French windows.*]

VANE. Is that boulder firm ?

PROPS [*going to where, in front of the back-cloth, and apparently among its apple trees, lies the counterfeitment of a mossy boulder ; he puts his foot on it*]. If you don't put too much weight on it, sir.

VANE. It won't creak ?

PROPS. Nao.

[*He mounts on it, and a dolorous creaking arises.*]

VANE. Make that right. Let me see that lute.

[*' PROPS ' produces a property lute.*]

[*While they scrutinize it, a broad man with broad leathery clean-shaven face and small mouth, occupied by the butt end of a cigar, has come on to the stage from stage Left, and stands waiting to be noticed.*]

PROPS [*attracted by the scent of the cigar*]. The Boss, sir.

VANE [*turning to ' PROPS '*]. That'll do, then.

[*' PROPS ' goes out through the French windows.*]

VANE [*to FRUST*]. Now, sir, we're all ready for rehearsal of ' Orpheus with his Lute.'

FRUST [*in a Cosmopolitan voice*]. ' Orphoos with his loot ! ' That his loot, Mr. Vane ? Why didn't he pinch something more precious ? Has this high-brow curtain-raiser of yours got any ' pep ' in it ?

VANE. It has charm.

FRUST. I'd thought of ' Pop goes the Weasel '

with little Miggs. We kind of want a cock-tail before 'Louisa Loses,' Mr. Vane.

VANE. Well, sir, you'll see.

FRUST. This your lighting? It's bit on the spiritool side. I've left my glasses. Guess I'll sit in the front row. Ha'f a minute. Who plays this Orphoos?

VANE. George Fleetway.

FRUST. Has he got punch?

VANE. It's a very small part.

FRUST. Who are the others?

VANE. Guy Toone plays the Professor; Vanessa Hellgrove his wife; Maude Hopkins the faun.

FRUST. H'm! Names don't draw.

VANE. They're not expensive, any of them. Miss Hellgrove's a find, I think.

FRUST. Pretty?

VANE. Quite.

FRUST. Arty?

VANE [*doubtfully*]. No. [*With resolution*] Look here, Mr. Frust, it's no use your expecting another 'Pop goes the Weasel.'

FRUST. We-ell, if it's got punch and go, that'll be enough for me. Let's get to it!

[*He extinguishes his cigar and descends the steps and sits in the centre of the front row of the stalls.*]

VANE. Mr. Foreson?

FORESON [*appearing through curtain, Right*]. Sir?

VANE. Beginners. Take your curtain down.

[*He descends the steps and seats himself next to FRUST.*
The curtain goes down.]

[A woman's voice is heard singing very beautifully Sullivan's song¹: 'Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees and the mountain tops that freeze,' etc.]

FRUST. Some voice !

[The curtain rises.]

[In the armchair the PROFESSOR is yawning, tall, thin, abstracted, and slightly grizzled in the hair. He has a pad of paper on his knee, ink on the stool to his right and the Encyclopedia volume on the stand to his left—barricaded in fact by the article he is writing. He is reading a page over to himself, but the words are drowned in the sound of the song his wife is singing in the next room, partly screened off by the curtain. She finishes, and stops. His voice can then be heard conning the words of his article.]

PROF. 'Orpheus symbolised the voice of Beauty, the call of life, luring us mortals with his song back from the graves we dig for ourselves. Probably the ancients realised this neither more nor less than we moderns. Mankind has not changed. The civilised being still hides the faun and the dryad within its broadcloth and its silk. And yet——' [He stops, with a dried-up air—rather impatiently] Go on, my dear ! It helps the atmosphere.

[The voice of his wife begins again, gets as far as 'made them sing' and stops dead, just as the PROFESSOR'S pen is beginning to scratch. And suddenly, drawing the curtain further aside,

[SHE appears. Much younger than the PROFESSOR,

¹ Or, for a choice, the setting by Vaughan Williams.—Ed.

pale, very pretty, of a Botticellian type in face, figure, and in her clinging cream-coloured frock. She gazes at her abstracted husband; then swiftly moves to the lintel of the open window, and stands looking out.

THE WIFE. God ! What beauty !

PROF. [*looking up*]. Umm ?

THE WIFE. I said : God ! What beauty !

PROF. Aha !

THE WIFE [*looking at him*]. Do you know that I have to repeat everything to you nowadays ?

PROF. What !

THE WIFE. That I have to repeat—

PROF. Yes ; I heard. I'm sorry. I get absorbed.

THE WIFE. In all but me.

PROF. [*startled*]. My dear, your song was helping me like anything to get the mood. This paper is the very deuce—to balance between the historical and the natural.

THE WIFE. Who wants the natural ?

PROF. [*grumbling*]. Ummm ! Wish *I* thought that ! Modern taste ! History may go hang ; they're all for tuppence-coloured sentiment nowadays.

THE WIFE [*as if to herself*]. Is the Spring sentiment ?

PROF. I beg your pardon, my dear ; I didn't catch.

WIFE [*as if against her will—urged by some pent-up force*]. Beauty, beauty !

PROF. That's what I'm trying to say here. The

Orpheus legend symbolises to this day the call of Beauty ! [*He takes up his pen, while she continues to stare out at the moonlight. Yawning*] Dash it ! I get so sleepy ; I wish you'd tell them to make the after-dinner coffee twice as strong.

WIFE. I will.

PROF. How does this strike you ? [*Conning*] 'Many Renaissance pictures, especially those of Botticelli, Francesca and Piero di Cosimo, were inspired by such legends as that of Orpheus, and we owe a tiny gem-like Raphael "Apollo and Marsyas" to the same Pagan inspiration.'

WIFE. We owe it more than that—rebellion against the dry-as-dust.

PROF. Quite ! I might develop that : 'We owe it our revolt against the academic ; or our disgust at "big business," and all the grossness of commercial success. We owe——' [*His voice peters out.*]

WIFE. It—love.

PROF. [*abstracted*]. Eh ?

WIFE. I said : We owe it love.

PROF. [*rather startled*]. Possibly. But—er—— [*With a dry smile*] I mustn't say that here—hardly !

WIFE [*to herself and the moonlight*]. Orpheus with his lute !

PROF. Most people think a lute is a sort of flute. [*Yawning heavily*] My dear, if you're not going to sing again, d'you mind sitting down ? I want to concentrate.

WIFE. I'm going out.

PROF. Mind the dew !

WIFE. The Christian virtues and the dew.

PROF. [*with a little dry laugh*]. Not bad ! Not bad ! The Christian virtues and the dew. [*His hand takes up his pen, his face droops over his paper, while his wife looks at him with a very strange face.*] ‘How far we can trace the modern resurgence against the Christian virtues to the symbolic figures of Orpheus, Pan, Apollo, and Bacchus might be difficult to estimate, but—’

[*During those words his WIFE has passed through the window into the moonlight, and her voice rises, singing as she goes : ‘Orpheus with his lute, with his lute made trees . . .’*]

PROF. [*suddenly aware of something*]. She’ll get her throat bad. [*He is silent as the voice swells in the distance.*] Sounds queer at night—H’m ! [*He is silent—Yawning. The voice dies away. Suddenly his head nods ; he fights his drowsiness ; writes a word or two, nods again, and in twenty seconds is asleep.*]

[*The Stage is darkened by a black-out.*]

[*FRUST’s voice is heard speaking.*]

FRUST. What’s the girl’s name ?

VANE. Vanessa Hellgrove.

FRUST. Aha !

[*The stage is lighted up again. Moonlight bright on the orchard ; the room in darkness where the Professor’s figure is just visible sleeping in the chair, and screwed a little more round towards the window. From behind the mossy boulder a faun-like figure*]

uncurls itself and peeps over with ears standing up and elbows leaning on the stone, playing a rustic pipe ; and there are seen two rabbits and a fox sitting up and listening. A shiver of wind passes, blowing petals from the apple-trees.

[*The FAUN darts his head towards where, from Right, comes slowly the figure of a Greek youth, holding a lute or lyre which his fingers strike, lifting out little wandering strains as of wind whinnying in funnels and odd corners. The FAUN darts down behind the stone, and the youth stands by the boulder playing his lute. Slowly while he plays the whitened trunk of an apple-tree is seen to dissolve into the body of a girl with bare arms and feet, her dark hair unbound, and the face of the PROFESSOR'S WIFE. Hypnotised, she slowly sways towards him, their eyes fixed on each other, till she is quite close. Her arms go out to him, cling round his neck, and their lips meet. But as they meet there comes a gasp and the PROFESSOR with rumpled hair is seen starting from his chair, his hands thrown up ; and at his horrified ' Oh ! ' the stage is darkened with a black-out.*

[*The voice of FRUST is heard speaking.*

FRUST. Gee !

[*The stage is lighted up again, as in the opening scene. The PROFESSOR is seen in his chair, with spilt sheets of paper round him, waking from a dream. He shakes himself, pinches his leg, stares heavily round into the moonlight, rises.*

PROF. Phew ! Beastly dream ! Boof ! H'm !
[*He moves to the window and calls*] Blanche ! Blanche !
[*To himself*] Made trees—made trees ! [*Calling*]
Blanche !

WIFE'S VOICE. Yes.

PROF. Where are you ?

WIFE [*appearing by the stone with her hair down*].
Here !

PROF. I say—I—I've been asleep—had a dream.
Come in. I'll tell you.

[*She comes, and they stand in the window.*]

PROF. I dreamed I saw a—faun on that boulder
blowing on a pipe. [*He looks nervously at the stone.*]
With two damned little rabbits and a fox sitting up
and listening. And then from out there came our
friend Orpheus playing on his confounded lute,
till he actually turned that tree there into *you*. And
gradually he—he drew you like a snake till you—er—
put your arms round his neck and—er—kissed him.
Boof ! I woke up. Most unpleasant. Why ! Your
hair's down !

WIFE. Yes.

PROF. Why ?

WIFE. It was no dream. He was bringing me
to life.

PROF. What on earth—— ?

WIFE. Do you suppose I *am* alive ? I'm as dead
as Euridice.

PROF. Good heavens, Blanche, what's the matter
with you to-night ?

WIFE [*pointing to the litter of papers*]. Why don't we *live*, instead of writing of it? [*She points out into the moonlight.*] What do we get out of life? *Money*, fame, fashion, talk, learning? Yes. And what good are they? I want to *live*!

PROF. [*helplessly*]. My dear, I really don't know what you mean.

WIFE [*pointing out into the moonlight*]. Look! Orpheus with his lute, and nobody can see him. Beauty, beauty, beauty—we let it go. [*With sudden passion*] Beauty, love, the spring. They should be in us, and they're all outside.

PROF. My dear, this is—this is—awful. [*He tries to embrace her.*]

WIFE [*avoiding him—in a stilly voice*]. Oh! Go on with your writing!

PROF. I'm—I'm upset. I've never known you so—so——

WIFE. Hysterical? Well! It's over. I'll go and sing.

PROF. [*soothingly*]. There, there! I'm sorry, darling; I really am. You're hipped—you're hipped. [*He gives and she accepts a kiss.*] Better? [*He gravitates towards his papers.*] All right, now?

WIFE [*standing still and looking at him*]. Quite!

PROF. Well, I'll try and finish this to-night; then, to-morrow we might have a jaunt. How about a theatre? There's a thing—they say—called 'Chinese Chops,' that's been running years.

WIFE [*softly to herself as he settles down into his chair*]. Oh ! God !

[*While he takes up a sheet of paper and adjusts himself, she stands at the window staring with all her might at the boulder, till from behind it the faun's head and shoulders emerge once more.*

PROF. Very queer the power suggestion has over the mind. Very queer ! There's nothing really in animism, you know, except the curious shapes rocks, trees and things take in certain lights—effect they have on our imagination. [*He looks up*] What's the matter now ?

WIFE [*startled*]. Nothing ! Nothing !

[*Her eyes waver to him again, and the FAUN vanishes. She turns again to look at the boulder ; there is nothing there ; a little shiver of wind blows some petals off the trees. She catches one of them, and turning quickly, goes out through the curtain.*

PROF. [*coming to himself and writing*]. ' The Orpheus legend is the—er—apotheosis of animism. Can we accept——' [*His voice is lost in the sound of his WIFE's voice beginning again : ' Orpheus with his lute—with his lute made trees——' It dies in a sob. The PROFESSOR looks up startled as the curtain falls.*]

FRUST. Fine ! Fine !

VANE. Take up the curtain. Mr. Foreson ?

[*The curtain goes up.*

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. Everybody on.

[*He and FRUST leave their seats and ascend on to the stage, on which are collecting the four Players.*

VANE. Give us some light.

FORESON. Electrics ! Turn up your floats !

[*The footlights go up, and the blue goes out ; the light is crude as at the beginning.*

FRUST. I'd like to meet Miss Hellgrove. [*She comes forward eagerly and timidly. He grasps her hand.*]

Miss Hellgrove, I want to say I thought that fine—fine. [*Her evident emotion and pleasure warm him so that he increases his grasp and commendation.*] Fine. It quite got my soft spots. Emotional. Fine !

Miss H. Oh ! Mr. Frust ; it means so much to me. Thank you !

FRUST [*a little balder in the eye, and losing warmth*]. Er—fine ! [*His eye wanders.*] Where's Mr. Flatway ?

VANE. Fleetway.

[*FLEETWAY comes up.*

FRUST. Mr. Fleetway, I want to say I thought your Orphoos very remarkable. Fine.

FLEETWAY. Thank you, sir, indeed—so glad you liked it.

FRUST [*a little balder in the eye*]. There wasn't much to it, but what there was was fine. Mr. Toone.

[*FLEETWAY melts out and TOONE is precipitated.* Mr. Toone, I was very pleased with your Professor—quite a character-study. [*TOONE bows and murmurs.*] Yes, sir ! I thought it fine. [*His eye grows bald.*] Who plays the goat ?

MISS HOPK. [*Appearing suddenly between the windows*]
I play the faun, Mr. Frust.

FORESON [*introducing*]. Miss Maude 'Opkins.

FRUST. Miss Hopkins, I guess your fawn was fine.

MISS HOPK. Oh ! Thank you, Mr. Frust. So nice of you to say so. I do so enjoy playing him.

FRUST [*his eyes growing bald*]. Mr. Foreson, I thought the way you fixed that tree was very cunning. I certainly did. Got a match ?

[*He takes a match from FORESON, and lighting a very long cigar, walks up stage through the French windows followed by FORESON, and examines the apple-tree.*

[*The two Actors depart, but MISS HELLGROVE runs from where she has been lingering, by the curtain, to VANE, stage Right.*

MISS H. Oh ! Mr. Vane—do you think ? He seemed quite—Oh ! Mr. Vane [*ecstatically*]. If only——

VANE [*pleased and happy*]. Yes, yes. All right—you were splendid. He liked it. He quite——

MISS H. [*clasping her hands*]. How wonderful ! Oh, Mr. Vane, thank you !

[*She clasps his hands ; but suddenly, seeing that FRUST is coming back, flits across to the curtain and vanishes.*

[*The stage, in the crude light, is empty now save for FRUST, who, in the French windows, Centre, is mumbling his cigar ; and VANE, stage Right, who is looking up into the wings, stage Left.*

VANE [*calling up*]. That lighting's just right now, Miller. Got it marked carefully?

ELECTRICS. Yes, Mr. Vane.

VANE. Good. [*To FRUST who is coming down*]
Well, sir? So glad——

FRUST. Mr. Vane, we got little Miggs on contract?

VANE. Yes.

FRUST. Well, I liked that little pocket piece fine. But I'm blamed if I know what it's all about.

VANE [*a little staggered*]. Why! Of course it's a little allegory. The tragedy of civilisation—all real feeling for Beauty and Nature kept out, or pent up even in the cultured.

FRUST. Ye-ep. [*Meditatively*] Little Miggs'd be fine in 'Pop goes the Weasel.'

VANE. Yes, he'd be all right, but——

FRUST. Get him on the 'phone, and put it into rehearsal right now.

VANE. What! But this piece—I—I——!

FRUST. Guess we can't take liberties with our public, Mr. Vane. They want pep.

VANE [*distressed*]. But it'll break that girl's heart. I—really—I can't——

FRUST. Give her the part of the 'tweeny in 'Pop goes.'

VANE. Mr. Frust, I—I beg. I've taken a lot of trouble with this little play. It's good. It's that girl's chance—and I——

FRUST. We-ell! I certainly thought she was fine. Now, you 'phone up Miggs, and get right

along with it. I've only one rule, sir ! Give the Public what it wants, and what the Public wants is punch and go. They've got no use for Beauty, Allegory, and all that high-brow racket. I know 'em as I know my hand.

[*During this speech Miss HELLGROVE is seen listening by the French windows, in distress, unnoticed by either of them.*]

VANE. Mr. Frust, the Public *would* take this, I'm sure they would ; I'm convinced of it. You under-rate them.

FRUST. Now, see here, Mr. Blewitt Vane, is this my theatre ? I tell you, I can't afford luxuries.

VANE. But it—it moved *you*, sir ; I saw it. I was watching.

FRUST [*with unmoved finality*]. Mr. Vane, I judge I'm not the average man. Before 'Louisa Loses' the Public'll want a stimulant. 'Pop goes the Weasel' will suit us fine. So—get right along with it. I'll go get some lunch.

[*As he vanishes into the wings, Left, Miss HELLGROVE covers her face with her hands. A little sob escaping her attracts VANE's attention. He takes a step towards her, but she flies.*]

VANE [*dashing his hands through his hair till it stands up*]. Damnation !

[*FORESON walks on from the wings, Right.*]

FORESON. Sir ?

VANE. 'Punch and go !' That *superstition* !

[*FORESON walks straight out into the wings, Left.*]

VANE. Mr. Foreson !

FORESON [*re-appearing*]. Sir ?

VANE. This is scrapped. [*With savagery*] Tell 'em to set the first act of 'Louisa Loses,' and put some pep into it.

[*He goes out through the French windows with the wind still in his hair.*]

FORESON [*in the centre of the stage*]. Electrics !

ELECTRICS. Hallo !

FORESON. Where's Charlie ?

ELECTRICS. Gone to his dinner.

FORESON. Anybody on the curtain ?

A VOICE. Yes, Mr. Foreson.

FORESON. Put your curtain down.

[*He stands in the centre of the stage with eyes uplifted as the curtain descends.*]

THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT

‘ SAKI ’

PERSONS IN THE PLAY :

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE.

LOUIS COURCET, *her nephew.*

JANE MARTLET.

STURRIDGE, MRS. BEAUWHISTLE'S *butler.*

PAGE BOY.

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THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT

Hall-sitting-room in MRS. BEAUWHISTLE'S country house. French window right. Doors right centre and mid centre. Staircase left centre. Door left. Long table centre of stage, towards footlights, set with breakfast service. Chairs at table. Writing table and chair right of stage. Small hall table back of stage. Wooden panelling below staircase hung with swords, daggers, etc. ; in view of audience. Stand with golf-clubs, etc., left.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE *seated at writing table ; she has had her breakfast. Enter LOUIS down staircase.*

LOUIS. Good morning, Aunt. [*He inspects the breakfast dishes.*]

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Good morning, Louis.

LOUIS. Where is Miss Martlet ? [*Helps himself from dish.*]

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. She finished her breakfast a moment ago.

LOUIS [*sits down*]. I'm glad we're alone ; I wanted to ask you—— [*Enter STURRIDGE left with coffee, which he places on table and withdraws*]. I wanted to ask you——

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Whether I could lend you twenty pounds I suppose ?

LOUIS. As a matter of fact I was only going to ask for fifteen. Perhaps twenty would sound better.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. The answer is the same in either case, and it's no. I couldn't even lend you five. You see I've had no end of extra expenses just lately——

LOUIS. My dear aunt, please don't give reasons. A charming woman should always be unreasonable, it's part of her charm. Just say, 'Louis, I love you very much, but I'm damned if I lend you any more money.' I should understand perfectly.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Well, we'll take it as said. I've just had a letter from Dora Bittholz, to say she is coming on Thursday.

LOUIS. This next Thursday ? I say, that's rather awkward isn't it ?

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Why awkward ?

LOUIS. Jane Martlet has only been here six days and she never stays less than a fortnight, even when she's asked definitely for a week. You'll never get her out of the house by Thursday.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. But why should I ? She and Dora are good friends, aren't they ? They used to be.

LOUIS. Used to be, yes ; that is what makes them such bitter enemies now. Each feels that she has nursed a viper in her bosom. Nothing fans the flame of human resentment so much as the discovery

that one's bosom has been utilised as a snake-sanatorium.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. But why are they enemies? What have they quarrelled about? Some man I suppose.

LOUIS. No. A hen has come between them.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. A hen! What hen?

LOUIS. It was a bronze Leghorn or some such exotic breed, and Dora sold it to Jane at a rather exotic price. They both go in for poultry breeding you know.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. If Jane agreed to give the price I don't see what there was to quarrel about——

LOUIS. Well, you see, the bird turned out to be an abstainer from the egg habit, and I'm told that the letters which passed between the two women were a revelation as to how much abuse could be got on to a sheet of notepaper.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. How ridiculous! Couldn't some of their friends compose the quarrel?

LOUIS. It would have been rather like composing the storm music of a Wagner opera. Jane was willing to take back some of her most libellous remarks if Dora would take back the hen.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. And wouldn't she?

LOUIS. Not she. She said that would be owning herself in the wrong, and you know that Dora would never, under any circumstances, own herself in the wrong. She would as soon think of owning a slum property in Whitechapel as do that.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. It will be a most awkward situation, having them both under my roof at the same time. Do you suppose they won't speak to one another?

LOUIS. On the contrary, the difficulty will be to get them to leave off. Their descriptions of each other's conduct and character have hitherto been governed by the fact that only four ounces of plain speaking can be sent through the post for a penny.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. What is to be done? I can't put Dora off, I've already postponed her visit once, and nothing short of a miracle would make Jane leave before her self-allotted fortnight is over.

LOUIS. I don't mind trying to supply a miracle at short notice—miracles are rather in my line.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. My dear Louis, you'll be clever if you get Jane out of this house before Thursday.

LOUIS. I shall not only be clever, I shall be rich; in sheer gratitude you will say to me, 'Louis, I love you more than ever, and here are the twenty pounds we were speaking about.'

[*Enter JANE door centre.*]

JANE. Good morning, Louis.

LOUIS [*rising*]. Good morning, Jane.

JANE. Go on with your breakfast; I've had mine but I'll just have a cup of coffee to keep you company. [*Helps herself.*] Is there any toast left?

LOUIS. Sturridge is bringing some. Here it comes.

[STURRIDGE *enters left with toast rack*. JANE *seats herself and is helped to toast ; she takes three pieces*.

JANE. Isn't there any butter ?

STURRIDGE. Your sleeve is in the butter, miss.

JANE. Oh, yes.

[*Helps herself generously*. *Exit STURRIDGE left*.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Jane dear, I see the Mac-kenzie-Hubbard wedding is on Thursday next. St. Peter's, Eaton Square, such a pretty church for weddings. I suppose you'll be wanting to run away from us to attend it. You were always such friends with Louisa Hubbard, it would hardly do for you not to turn up.

JANE. Oh I'm not going to bother to go all that way for a silly wedding, much as I like Louisa ; I shall go and stay with her for several weeks after she's come back from her honeymoon. [LOUIS *grins across at his aunt*.] I don't see any honey !

LOUIS. Your other sleeve's in the honey.

JANE. Bother, so it is. [*Helps herself liberally*.]

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE [*rising*]. Well, I must leave you and go and do some gardening. Ring for anything you want, Jane.

JANE. Thank you, I'm all right.

[*Exit MRS. BEAUWHISTLE by French window right*.

LOUIS [*pushing back his chair*]. Do you mind my smoking ?

JANE [*still eating heartily*]. Not at all. [*Enter STURRIDGE with tray, left, as if to clear away breakfast*

things. Places tray on side table, back centre, and is about to retire.] Oh, I say, can I have some more hot milk? This is nearly cold.

[STURRIDGE *takes jug and exit left. LOUIS looks fixedly after him. Seats himself near JANE and stares solemnly at the floor.*

LOUIS. Servants are a bit of a nuisance.

JANE. Servants a nuisance! I should think they are! The trouble I have in getting suited you would hardly believe. But I don't see what you have to complain of—your aunt is so wonderfully lucky in her servants. Sturridge for instance—he's been with her for years and I'm sure he's a jewel as butlers go.

LOUIS. That's just the trouble. It's when servants have been with you for years that they become a really serious nuisance. The other sort, the here to-day and gone to-morrow lot, don't matter—you've simply got to replace them. It's the stayers and the jewels that are the real worry.

JANE. But if they give satisfaction——

LOUIS. That doesn't prevent them from giving trouble. As it happens, I was particularly thinking of Sturridge when I made the remark about servants being a nuisance.

JANE. The excellent Sturridge a nuisance! I can't believe it.

LOUIS. I know he is excellent and my aunt simply couldn't get along without him. But his very excellence has had an effect on him.

JANE. What effect?

LOUIS [*solemnly*]. Have you ever considered what it must be like to go on unceasingly doing the correct thing in the correct manner in the same surroundings for the greater part of a lifetime? To know and ordain and superintend exactly what silver and glass and table linen shall be used and set out on what occasions, to have pantry and cellar and plate-cupboard under a minutely devised and undeviating administration, to be noiseless, impalpable, omnipresent, infallible?

JANE [*with conviction*]. I should go mad.

LOUIS. Exactly. Mad.

[*Enter STURRIDGE left with milk jug which he places on table and exit left.*]

JANE. But—Sturridge hasn't gone mad.

LOUIS. On most points he's thoroughly sane and reliable, but at times he is subject to the most obstinate delusions.

JANE. Delusions—what sort of delusions? [*She helps herself to more coffee.*]

LOUIS. Unfortunately they usually centre round someone staying in the house; that is where the awkwardness comes in. For instance, he took it into his head that Matilda Sheringham, who was here last summer, was the Prophet Elijah.

JANE. The Prophet Elijah! The man who was fed by ravens?

LOUIS. Yes, it was the ravens that particularly impressed Sturridge's imagination. He was rather offended, it seems, at the idea that Matilda should

have her private catering arrangements and he declined to compete with the birds in any way ; he wouldn't allow any tea to be sent up to her in the morning and when he waited at table he passed her over altogether in handing round the dishes. Poor Matilda could scarcely get anything to eat.

JANE. How horrible ! How very horrible !
Whatever did you do ?

LOUIS. It was judged best for her to cut her visit short. [*With emphasis*] In a case of that kind it was the only thing to be done.

JANE. I shouldn't have done that. [*Cuts herself some bread and butters it.*] I should have humoured him in some way. I should have said the ravens were moulting. I certainly shouldn't have gone away.

LOUIS. It's not always wise to humour people when they get these ideas into their heads. There's no knowing to what lengths they might go.

JANE. You don't mean to say Sturridge might be dangerous ?

LOUIS. One can never be certain. Now and then he gets some idea about a guest which might take an unfortunate turn. That is what is worrying me at the present moment.

JANE [*excitedly*]. Why, has he taken some fancy about me ?

LOUIS [*who has taken a putter out of the stand, left, and is polishing it with an oil rag*]. He has.

JANE. No, really? Who on earth does he think I am?

LOUIS. Queen Anne.

JANE. Queen Anne! What an idea! But anyhow there's nothing dangerous about her; she's such a colourless personality. No one could feel very strongly about Queen Anne.

LOUIS [*sternly*]. What does posterity chiefly say about her?

JANE. The only thing I can remember about her is the saying ‘ Queen Anne's dead.’

LOUIS. Exactly. Dead.

JANE. Do you mean that he takes me for the *ghost* of Queen Anne?

LOUIS. Ghost? Dear no. Who ever heard of a ghost that came down to breakfast and ate kidneys and toast and honey with a healthy appetite? No, it's the fact of you being so very much alive and flourishing that perplexes and irritates him.

JANE [*anxiously*]. Irritates him?

LOUIS. Yes. All his life he has been accustomed to look on Queen Anne as the personification of everything that is dead and done with, ‘ as dead as Queen Anne ’ you know, and now he has to fill your glass at lunch and dinner and listen to your accounts of the gay time you had at the Dublin Horse Show, and naturally he feels that there is something scandalously wrong somewhere.

JANE [*with increased anxiety*]. But he wouldn't be

downright hostile to me on that account, would he ? Not violent ?

LOUIS [*carelessly*]. I didn't get really alarmed about it till last night, when he was bringing in the coffee. I caught him scowling at you with a very threatening look and muttering things about you.

JANE. What things ?

LOUIS. That you ought to be dead long ago and that someone should see to it, and that if no one else did, he would. [*Cheerfully*] That's why I mentioned the matter to you.

JANE. This is awful ! Your aunt must be told about it at once.

LOUIS. My aunt mustn't hear a word about it. It would upset her dreadfully. She relies on Sturridge for everything.

JANE. But he might kill me at any moment !

LOUIS. Not at any moment ; he's busy with the silver all the afternoon.

JANE. What a frightful situation to be in, with a mad butler dangling over one's head.

LOUIS. Of course it's only a temporary madness ; perhaps if you were to cut your visit short and come to us some time later in the year he might have forgotten all about Queen Anne.

JANE. Nothing would induce me to cut short my visit. You must keep a sharp look out on Sturridge and be ready to intervene if he gets violent. Probably we are both exaggerating things a bit. [*Rising.*] I must go and write some letters in the morning-

room. Mind, keep an eye on the man. [*Exit door right centre.*]

LOUIS [*savagely*]. *Quel type !*

[*Enter MRS. BEAUWHISTLE by French window right.*]

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Can't find my gardening gloves anywhere. I suppose they are where I left them ; it's a way my things have. [*Rummages in drawer of table back centre*]. They are. [*Produces gloves from drawer*]. And how is your miracle doing, Louis ?

LOUIS. Rotten ! I've invented all sorts of excellent reasons for stimulating the migration instinct in that woman, but you might as well try to drive away an attack of indigestion by talking to it.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. Poor Louis ! I'm afraid Jane's staying powers are superior to any amount of hustling that you can bring to bear. [*Enter STURRIDGE left ; he begins clearing breakfast things.*] I could have told you from the first that you were engaged on a wild-goose-chase.

LOUIS. Chase ! You can't chase a thing that refuses to budge. One of the first conditions of the chase is that the thing you are chasing should run away.

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE [*laughing*]. That's a condition that Jane will never fulfil.

[*Exit through window right.* LOUIS continues cleaning golf club, then suddenly stops and looks reflectively at STURRIDGE, who is busy with the breakfast things.

LOUIS. Where is Miss Martlet ?

STURRIDGE. In the morning-room, I believe, sir, writing letters.

LOUIS. You see that old basket-hilted sword on the wall ?

STURRIDGE. Yes, sir. This big one ? [*Points to sword.*]

LOUIS. Miss Martlet wants to copy the inscription on its blade. I wish you would take it to her ; my hands are all over oil.

STURRIDGE. Yes, sir. [*Turns to wall where sword is hanging.*]

LOUIS. Take it without the sheath, it will be less trouble.

[*STURRIDGE draws the blade, which is broad and bright, and exit by door centre. LOUIS stands back under shadow of staircase. Enter JANE door right centre, at full run, screams : ' Louis ! Louis ! Where are you ? ' and rushes up stairs at top speed. Enter STURRIDGE door right centre, sword in hand. LOUIS steps forward.*

STURRIDGE. Miss Martlet slipped out of the room sir, as I came in ; I don't think she saw me coming. Seemed in a bit of a hurry.

LOUIS. Perhaps she has a train to catch. Never mind, you can put the sword back. I'll copy out the inscription for her myself later.

[*STURRIDGE returns sword to its place. LOUIS continues cleaning putter. STURRIDGE carries breakfast tray out by door left. Enter PAGE, running full speed down stairs*].

PAGE. The time-table ! Miss Martlet wants to look up a train.

[LOUIS dashes to drawer of small table centre ; he and PAGE hunt through contents, throwing gloves, etc. on to floor.

LOUIS. Here it is ! [PAGE seizes book, starts to run upstairs, LOUIS grabs him by tip of jacket, pulls him back, opens book, searches frantically]. Here you are. Leaves eleven fifty-five, arrives Charing Cross two twenty. [Page dashes upstairs with time-table. LOUIS flies to speaking tube in wall, left, whistles down it.] Is that you, Tomkins ? The car as quick as you can, to catch the eleven fifty-five. Never mind your livery, just as you are.

[Shuts off tube. Page dashes down stairs.

PAGE. Miss Martlet's golf-clubs !

[LOUIS dashes for them in stand, and gives them to boy.

LOUIS. Here, this Tam-'o-shanter is hers—and this motor veil. [Gives them to boy.]

PAGE. She said there was a novel of hers down here.

[LOUIS goes to writing table where there are six books on shelf and gives them all to PAGE.

LOUIS. Here, take the lot. Fly ! [He pushes the PAGE vigorously up first steps of staircase. Exit PAGE. The sound of books dropping can be heard as he goes. LOUIS dashes round room to see if anything more belonging to JANE remains. Looks at his watch, compares it with small clock on writing table. Goes to speaking tube.] Hullo, is Tomkins there ? What ? Oh, all right.

[*Shuts off tube. Goes to table where coffee pot still remains and pours out cup of coffee, drinks it. Looks again at watch.*]

STURRIDGE [*enters left*]. The car has come round, sir.

LOUIS. Good. I'll go and tell Miss Martlet. Will you find my aunt, she's somewhere in the garden, and tell her that Miss Martlet had to leave in a hurry to catch the eleven fifty-five; called away urgently and couldn't stop to say good-bye. Matter of life and death.

STURRIDGE. Yes, sir.

[*Exit STURRIDGE door left. LOUIS exit up staircase.*]

Enter MRS. BEAUWHISTLE by window right. She has a letter in her hand. She looks in at door right centre, returns and calls: 'Louis—Louis!' Sound of a motor heard, LOUIS rushes in by door left.

LOUIS [*excitedly*]. How much did you say you'd lend me if I got rid of Jane Martlet?

MRS. BEAUWHISTLE. We needn't get rid of her. Dora has just written to say she can't come this month.

[*LOUIS collapses into chair.*]

CURTAIN

“ No epilogue, I pray you : for
Your play needs no excuse.”

Midsummer Night's Dream.

NOTES

THE SHADOW OF THE GLEN

John Millington Synge (1871-1909) is probably the most original genius among the distinguished band of playwrights that the Irish Theatre has presented to modern drama. Mr. Yeats with his dream-like poetical beauty has approached the theatre as in ceremonious mystery. Lady Gregory traces Irish life with the faithfulness of *petit-point*. These are not Synge's ways: he wanted robust human stuff, full of colour and set forth with the heightened expression that he felt to be the gift of the Irish imagination, its unsuppressed poetry. His vigour and his flavour are his own, and so are his views. He saw no use in the naturalistic copyist—'Ibsen and Zola dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words. On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy.'¹ Synge's aesthetic notes are scanty and rather rough, but they come from a mind that discerned the difference between art and its raw stuff, life. Faithful to life he was, but rich: 'When I was writing *The Shadow of the Glen* . . . I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen. This matter, I think, is of importance, for in countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form.'²

Synge perceived clearly that art may heighten and intensify its material. 'In a good play every speech should be as fully flavoured as a nut or apple.'³ Nor was it as mere decoration that he sought this richness. 'The artistic value of any work of art is measured by its uniqueness. Its human value is given largely by its intensity and its richness, for if it is rich it is many-sided or universal, and, for this reason, sane—another word for wholesome, since all insanities are

¹ Preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

due to one-sided excitement.' ¹ And in a preceding passage : 'The heartiness of real and frank laughter is a sign that cannot be mistaken that what we laugh at is not out of harmony with that instinct of sanity that we call by so many names.' ²

In his poems Synge is inclined to cultivate crudity. 'It may almost be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.' ³ His work is not in fashion now as it was in the years before the war, but his genius has force enough to outwear fashions.

The Shadow of the Glen (1905) was Synge's first published work. The untried hand launched a masterpiece. One critic, Mr. P. P. Howe, insists that 'There is no one-act play in the language for compression, for humanity, and for perfection of form, to put near (it).'

In actual production young players should be warned against fulsome attempts at brogue. An indication by intonation is better ; and Irish people do not say 'oi' for 'I' but something like 'oci.' The present writer has found it effective to open with a still scene, except for the wind and the rain, and let Norah bring in a lighted lamp, adding to the candles already set. The speeches must of course come quickly 'on cues,' but practised intonation will make them musically slow and clear, only Dan being allowed a *crescendo* to the point of shouting.

THE STORM

When the literary history of the twentieth century comes to be written, its early years may well be honoured for a return to poetic sincerity. Such diverse poets as Rupert Brooke and Mr. John Masefield were working not for our escape into Arthurian legend, or Proverbs in Porcelain, but for our share in the beauty of life ancient and modern, the vision of the spirit unquelled by the sophistication of commercialised society. It was in this spirit that Mr. Drinkwater and his friend, now Sir Barry Jackson, founded, in 1907, the 'Pilgrim Players,' a movement presently to develop into the Birmingham Repertory Theatre. In that theatre Mr. Drinkwater himself played over sixty parts, nor did his work as actor and general manager trammel his activity as a poet : on the contrary, while his slim volumes of lyrics were coming from the press, such works as *Cophetua* (1911), *Rebellion* (1914), *The Storm* (1915) and *X = 0* (1917) show the stimulus of the theatre on a mind that sees, as between poetry and drama, no fundamental difference of poetic truth. That is not to say that the powers and limitations of the two forms of art do not present vastly different conditions, in the differ-

¹ Extract from *Note Book*, published in Messrs. Allen & Unwin's edition.

² *Ibid.*

³ Preface to *Poems and Translations*.

entiation of which Mr. Drinkwater, actor-poet, has spent years of rigorous craftsmanship; but it is the poet who sees; and when, in his celebrated *Abraham Lincoln* (1918), Mr. Drinkwater went over to prose-medium, it was poetic vision of character, impulse and ideal that enriched his words and his scene. To quote the author's own confession: 'In the days when verse was the natural speech of the theatre, its beauty, like the beauty of all fine style, reached the audience without any insistence upon itself. The guiding principle of the speech of these plays later than *X = o* has been, so far as I could manage it, to make it beautiful without letting anybody know about it.'¹

Mr. Drinkwater's work is very versatile but never casual. He has written drama upon fateful themes (*Mary Stuart*, 1922; *Oliver Cromwell*, 1923), he has written comedy (*Bird in Hand*, 1927) and masques. His essays and prose writings are full of stimulating thought, finely tempered and finely stated, and two delightfully written volumes of autobiography (*Inheritance and Discovery*) let the reader into the poet's confidence with the most lovable sincerity. Mr. Drinkwater is not revolutionary, because of his constant sense of loyalty to beauty, which includes the beauty of the past and means veneration. What traditions he can employ with power he accepts thankfully. His own chief characteristics are pride of spirit, sense of humour, and this unswerving sense of the ultimate beauty of life.

The Storm (1915) is a product of a time when the young Repertory Theatre was impressed by the Irish School, by the fresh values seen in peasant life and setting. It would be interesting to trace the debt of the movement to Tolstoy (*What is Art?*), with whom Synge partly agrees. One could compare George Calderon's *Stone House* and other work of Russian influence. However this may be, Mr. Drinkwater takes his own way and gives not so much character drawing as the duel of the woman's mind with the tyranny of the storm (cf. Introduction). The producer is in danger of peasant-play mannerism if he allows Sarah to chant: she must speak quietly as one acquainted with the inexorable. It might be argued that no peasant is so eloquent as the young wife. But we are concerned with the cruelty of the storm and with human suffering, not with bucolic specimens. The author provides the answer when he says 'The modern play about Salford or Wiltshire or Mayfair, if it is worth anything at all, is not concerned chiefly with the superficial peculiarities of these respective environments, but in each case uses the environment and its peculiarities as a familiar means whereby the dramatist can approach his audience and say what he has in him to say about life.'²

¹ Preface to *Collected Plays*, 1925.

² *Ibid.*

A PARTING

Mr. Gordon Bottomley, a Yorkshireman bred and born, is one of those poets who offer living denial of the supposition that old beauty is ousted from the minds of modern men. True, he usually turns away from the spectacle of modern civilisation for his themes. He is apt to dwell on 'old, unhappy, far-off things,' as in *Laodice and Danaë* (1906), *The Riding to Lithend* (1907), *King Lear's Wife* (1913), and *Gruach* (1923). The last-named play was chosen for the award of the Femina Prize. Readers who wish to deepen their understanding of Mr. Bottomley's work may well begin with *Lear's Wife*, where they will find in strength the mind that is stung by dramatic significance and quickened by dread conflict in human motive. Here both imagery and irony are more stark, vivid and violent than our urbane ears had been accustomed to hear; but the effect, as one watched the rehearsals in 1915 (Birmingham Repertory Company), was an assurance that the beauty and majesty inherent in human fate and tragedy was a far more real and lasting thing than the temporal hubbub we call business. Such was Mr. Bottomley's allegiance to the group of poets instanced in the foregoing note. I have made this mention of *Lear's Wife* first as a warning to readers to extend their view of this poet's powers, and second to contrast the altogether different, exquisitely gentle duologue called *A Parting*, insisting however that this, too, in its own way gives the lie to the defeat of beauty in our modern age.

In *A Parting* the quiet-toned speech is of entirely modern idiom. It hardly tries for colour, having what a painter would call 'low values' throughout; and yet it is consistently poetical because it follows faithfully the true minds and thoughts of the two women, the younger in her anxiety and affectionate bewilderment, the older in her anxiety and matured loyalty.

'We have taken your friend into our vision and purpose,
And now we have a duty together to him . . .'

Where shall we find another play that has within so small a compass an ethical climax of the truth and dignity of that quiet speech?

As to performance, the modernity of the lines, with their subtly broken and attenuated rhythms, gives great scope for sincere verse-speaking. Setting is hardly required. Costumes should be quiet but modern: to put the women in draperies seems to me to be 'high-brow' lack of integrity. The following quotation from Mr. Bottomley's own *Note* shows the mood and aim with which the poet turned away from the average stage: 'Now that poetry is belittled and misused and maimed in the Theatre—when it is

admitted there at all—and the art of verse-speaking has had to be rediscovered for its own sake, its followers have begun to ask for dramatic poetry that can fulfil itself in the performer, that does not need the mechanism and equipment of a theatre for its unfolding, but that can be produced in any room large enough for a gathering-place; and that by such intimacy obtains opportunities for subtle ranges of nuance and effect that can be compared with those of a string-quartet . . . a drama whose deepest foundation is the exquisitely beautiful speech which work and devotion and a trained ear can obtain from the human voice.¹

SMOKE-SCREENS

It is the pleasure of professors and critics to make close comparisons of one author with another; to which young students of originality may object that no author ever conceived his work for this purpose or process, leaving Dogberry after all in the right as to the value of comparisons. The answer to the objection is that the student obtains his mental stocktaking from such process: he can gain good bearings, if he is wise, without loss of appreciation of the authors compared.

Mr. Brighouse approaches the theatre at an angle quite different from that of Mr. Bottomley. He has written many one-act plays, the best known of which are probably *Lonesome Like* and *The Price of Coal*, both of 1911, both dealing with humble characters of his native Lancashire, in the manner shared by his fellow-dramatist and some-time collaborator, Stanley Houghton. His most successful full-length play is *Hobson's Choice*, a comedy in similar milieu. Even as Synge looked for dramatic significance in his peasants, Houghton and Mr. Brighouse seek to embody in faithfully-drawn local types their sense of the drama of life. Miss Horniman's Manchester Repertory and later the Liverpool Playhouse welcomed enthusiastically this new realism. We must remember, however, in comparing Synge, that the Irishman deprecated, *q.v.a.*, the realism of 'joyless, pallid words,' and, compared with his rich medium, the honest Lancashire speech was drab. In fact the Repertory Theatre was in danger, at the hands of copyists, from stunning success in the achievement of squalid circumstance. Even to-day the earnest theatre, challenging the sybarites of the West End, is in danger of this altogether secondary object. Looking back on its pre-war kitchens and public-houses, one realises one's debt to dramatists with Mr. Brighouse's sense of the theatre, his ability to hold the

¹ Note to *Scenes and Plays*.

human theme triumphantly above the preoccupation of realistic milieu.

In *Smoke-Screens* Mr. Brighouse has certainly discarded the kitchen and, with admirable flexibility of sympathy, he gives a smart London 'Interior,' the flat of a self-made woman, in all its purely post-war inferences. The modes, manners and speech are bright, and to some people, harsh. But the refined ones among us must not allow the hard exterior of Mr. Brighouse's modern young woman to distract our appreciation of the insight with which he handles the human theme. Clarice has a slice of excellent juvenile comedy. Nobody should be allowed to be over-emphatic or shrill : the author has provided ample tension beneath sophisticated brightness.

Mr. Bottomley concentrates on what parting means, particularly to the mother. Mr. Brighouse has exactly the same theme in conclusion, with a method entirely different. Mr. Bottomley is gentle, poetic and general : Mr. Brighouse is purposely harsh and prosaic, and he particularises his theme both in manners and in motivation, for his 'parting' is conditioned by a post-war divorce and circumstances peculiar to these decades. Mr. Bottomley would dispense with setting that divides performer and hearer, so that his delicate poetry may become homely and intimate among us. Mr. Brighouse has more sense of 'theatre' as commonly understood : he would strike us with exit and entrance, with situation, the sense of which he inherits from the Edwardian theatre. I am sure he would not, like Mr. Bottomley, wish the frame-setting of the proscenium away. Yet their theme of mother and daughter is as old as the hills : that each author gives a purely modern version, startlingly different in mode, makes the contrast very interesting.

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

This play has been included chiefly because it is a clever and pleasant representation of the temperament of modern English people, who might well find nocturnal alarm a matter of objective entertainment. I have heard critics question Mr. Phillpotts's handling of this burglar episode as hardly credible and in any case long drawn out. On the first point depends the whole worth of the play. It seems to me the reward of good breeding that it owners possess themselves without flaws or tremors when faced with the unexpected. Young Sydney is the first to come across the 'Wolf' and it does not occur to him to lose his balance. The others follow suit : they find the burglar a genuinely interesting novelty. The comedy lies mainly in 'the tables turned' : it is the burglar who meets with the unexpected, and we enjoy his bewilderment at

being treated with such genuine politeness. Possibly the play could be shorter without heavy loss ; but the thing is a pleasantly dramatised episode, and can be played with conviction if only the Sydney family achieve the difficult task of domestic ease on the stage. Visible exaggeration will, as ever, damage the presentation irreparably : the older characters are pitfalls for the amateur in this respect. Your 'character' actors can make them monstrous, whereas they are only older examples of the well-bred family.

Mr. Phillpotts, like his younger fellow-dramatist Mr. Drinkwater, spent some years in the insurance business before he began to write. *The Farmer's Wife* is his most celebrated play ; it appeared in 1924 and its happy, sunny wit carried it through a run of over 1300 performances. Mr. Phillpotts, like Mr. Brighouse, has found collaboration congenial. *The Angel in the House* (1915) was written with Mr. B. Macdonald Hastings, and *Yellow Sands* (1933) with Adelaide Phillpotts, our author's daughter.

For forty years Mr. Phillpotts has been delighting his readers with the lively performances of his muse. He can tell an excellent story, and in all he does we feel the constant humour of a genuine and kindly observer of mankind.

LOVE AND HOW TO CURE IT

Mr. Thornton Wilder was born in America in 1897, but his early education he gained at an English school in Shanghai, where his father was Consul-General. Afterwards he went to school in America, passing from Yale and Princeton to classical studies in the American Academy in Rome. From schoolmastering in America he has now passed on to the staff of Chicago University.

Mr. Wilder came into fame with his novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. The constant characteristic of his work is sensitive valuation of people's emotional bias, and he accompanies his people with a most sure sense of background. The 'Bridge' gave him a focusing point for his human picture : in *Love and How to Cure It* he has extended his focal length unexpectedly far from his native America to compass a glimpse of stage-life in the old Tivoli Music Hall in London. He has succeeded through his gift of sympathy. Mrs. Sylvia Lynd has said that 'Mr. Wilder is one of the few among the younger writers who seem to know anything about either sorrow or affection . . .' The one-act comedy here included well represents this power of sympathy. The sentimental affection of the music-hall actor is not over-stressed but offered for what it is worth. The little intrigue over the danger-point, the revolver, is neat, and can be made effective by quiet, sincere playing. Much depends on

the difficult part of Linda. She must be common but not loud, and any attempt to make her romantic will rob the care with which the author has made her shallowness pathetic.

PUNCH AND GO

John Galsworthy (1867-1933) is so widely read and known that there is no need to dwell upon his qualities here in introducing his lively little play. He was purely, strongly English. His celebrated *Forsyte* novels not only mirror a hundred years of English society but express his deep affection for England's temper, her scenes and her institutions. True, he is chiefly the historian of the wealthier classes; but if some reproach him for that, none can reproach him for loving the things he loved, namely justice of spirit and graciousness of mind. His spirit and his tastes are to be gathered from thousands of pages; they are concentrated in the little study called *A Portrait* (1910) said to be a tribute to his father.

No matter what his *milieu*, in law-court, street or stable, he was keenly awake to colour and to motive, and he brings these sensitive faculties to bear on his plays. The best known of them are *The Silver Box* (1906), *Strife* (1909), *The Skin Game* (1920), and *Loyalties* (1922). He wrote six one-act plays, of which the most popular is probably *The Little Man* (1915). The first two plays and the last illustrate one of his constant themes, compassion: another, that of good-breeding, is well seen in *The Skin Game*. Galsworthy had the honour of serving the young Repertory Movement with perhaps its sanest stuff at a time when he and Mr. Shaw stood between the theatrical contrivances of the old 'low-brow' theatre and the precious earnestness of the 'high-brow' movement, with its kitchens, its peasants, or its Maeterlinck. While Mr. Shaw's wit raked our age with criticism, Galsworthy tried to portray the fabric of society with dramatic compassion. His plays, rather than his novels, are biased in favour of the 'under-dog' (see *The Silver Box*).

In the present 'Little Comedy' there is, amid the comic amusement, a little touch of compassion for the disappointed artist and a representative piece of scorn of the vulgar 'boss.' *Punch and Go* is difficult to produce. All the effects need expert timing, and a good technical outfit is indispensable. But the little piece offers ample fun in the reading. The vagaries of stage-manager and electrician which open the play need an extra share of imagination if the play is not being produced; but to a producer who has struggled in strange theatres with a performance imminent, the alarming comedy of those effects is uncannily faithful. Special admiration is also due of the author's neatness in fitting the rehearsal-scene into the

auditorium—'The audience though present, is not supposed to be'—and the prosaic order for the final curtain is a model piece of rounding-off.

THE ROSE AND THE CROSS

Mr. Clifford Bax is a Londoner, born in Streatham in 1886, a member of a highly gifted family, his brother being Mr. Arnold Bax, the composer. He studied painting in London and on the Continent, but subsequently abandoned painting for drama and poetry. *The Poetasters of Ispahan* (1912), one of his best-known short plays, was his first work in the commercial theatre. In 1922 appeared *Polly*, a successful adaptation from Gay, and in 1923 Mr. Bax collaborated with the late Sir Nigel Playfair in adapting *The Insect Play* from the Czech. *Mr. Pepys* (1926), set to music by Mr. Martin Shaw, offers another instance of our author's versatility. He has edited comedies by Goldoni. He has written a dozen one-act plays in prose and verse. Of these *Square Pegs* is one of the most successful, offering a well-drawn contrast of two young women of modern and renaissance outlook. In 1929 Mr. Bax was elected Chairman of the Incorporated Stage Society. His most successful play before the public was *The Rose without a Thorn* (1932), a work dealing with the love and death of Katheryn Howard. Mr. Bax's collected poems are to be found in a volume called *Farewell, My Muse*.

The Rose and the Cross (1918) was written as a 'Studio Play.' It belongs to a time when earnest artists of the theatre were breaking into the existing traditions of stage-framework, hence the simple and partly archaic *mise-en-scène* and the device of the Tellers. Mr. Yeats had already used 'folders' for his studio plays—that is to say, the introduction of ceremonial opening by living curtain bearers—and Mr. Bottomley has added the contrivance of a living screen of people, to move in unveiling the play. It will be remembered that even in so popular a drama as *Abraham Lincoln* Mr. Drinkwater introduced Chroniclers who interpolate verse commentary in the manner of Greek Chorus.

Mr. Bax has given ample instruction as to just what happens. The differences of character are simple and clear as in 'Morality' playing. The Tellers must rehearse a grace of slight gesture and movement, so that they appear not as interrupters. The poetry will carry its meaning best by sweet and grave-eyed delivery rather than by over-dramatic emphasis: it must be free from any of the pomposity or moaning which High Art—or rather High Elocution—sometimes demands as its rite.

1. 17—'Sage Averroes' or Averrhoes was an Arabian philosopher

of the second half of the twelfth century. He wrote well-known commentaries on Aristotle and Plato and a medical work usually called *Colliget Averois*. His real name, my Encyclopaedia tells me, was Abul-Walid Mohammed ibn-Ahmad Ibn-Mohammed ibn-Rushd.

THE MIRACLE-MERCHANT

This is 'Saki's' dramatic version of his own short story called *The Hen*, which is the fifth tale in the collection entitled *Beasts and Superbeasts*. It is very interesting to compare the two and to observe the skilful addition of suitable stage movement: much of the dialogue remains unaltered, but the breakfast business, for instance, is added to enliven the scene.

The best account of the life, character and style of 'Saki' (Hector Hugh Munro, 1870-1916) is that by Miss Ethel M. Munro, his sister, a short biography to be found in his volume *The Square Egg*. Munro was our non-sentimentalist story writer of that age. His mind is clear, mischievous, merry and satirical. The courage and generosity of his own lovable character shine through, but his wit is ever cool and polished. After service in Further-India, after adventures as a journalist in Russia and in the Balkans, after literary and social delights in London, he enlisted as an infantryman in the ranks and, as a never-flinching, much-loved comrade, he died in battle. His verve and his resolute tastes are mirrored in that biography. Extracts are borrowed here because they seem to me to bear on the character of this very comedy. In the first place he was particularly susceptible to bores, and possibly the inflictions of his aunts on the sensitive spirit of the child Hector made him the less tolerant of female bores. One should regard in this connexion the grim little story *Sredni Vashtar* or the merry letter to his sister (17. 8. 01) on his getting his Aunt Tom to Edinburgh. The biography has many of his pranks. He had a tiger-cub once in an hotel and the creature battered at the door between his bedroom and that of a boring spinster—'The situation was awful—in my room a noise like the lion house at 4 P.M., while on the other side of the door rose the beautiful Litany of the Church of England. . . . I fled. . . . When I came back I heard words in the next room that never came out of the Psalms; words such as no old lady ought to use. . . . She left.' (So did Miss Martlet in our comedy.)

Even more interesting is the opening passage of the biography:

'My earliest recollection of Hector, my younger brother, was in the nursery at home, where, with my elder brother, Charlie, we had been left alone. Hector seized the long-handled hearth

brush, plunged it into the fire, and chased Charlie and me round the table, shouting, "I'm God! I'm going to destroy the world!"

'The "world" tore round and round the all-too-inadequate table, not daring to leave it to dash for the door, while Hector, his face lit with impish glee and the flare from the brush, enjoyed to the full his self-imposed divinity.'

The boy in that picture is the same individual as the man who sent Sturridge sword in hand to Miss Martlet.

P. W.

